



PHD

**Don't Fence Us In! Perceptions of east Germanness among the 1970s generation in Berlin**

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# **Don't Fence Us In!**

## **Perceptions of east Germanness among the 1970s generation in Berlin**

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**A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
University of Bath  
Department of Politics, Languages and International Studies  
2012**

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## **Abstract**

This thesis explores how Germans born in the GDR during the 1970s engage with discourses about the east when discursively constructing their identities in contemporary unified Germany. Existing academic research into east Germanness has largely focused on the idea of a collective identity, and consists of two predominant lines of argument. The first suggests that eastern identities jeopardise German unity, implying that east Germanness cannot exist alongside Germanness. The second problematises the often negative representations of easterners in the popular sphere. Taking this discourse as its basis, however, it risks overlooking the ways that easterners themselves perceive the east. By taking a constructivist approach and adopting a qualitative, interpretive methodology, the thesis gains in-depth insights into the complex ways in which easterners themselves negotiate a sense of east Germanness. The research consists of twenty in-depth interviews which were designed around the theme of consumption, a social and discursive practice common to the GDR and unified Germany, but one which has changed dramatically since unification. The findings revealed that popular perceptions do indeed contribute to the participants' understandings. However, they presented a more differentiated and complex picture of the east, which enabled them to construct a form of east Germanness which better fits their understandings. Importantly, it appears that these perceptions are not represented in current discourses. Using generation to identify themselves as a unique group, the participants distanced themselves from negative perceptions of the east and identified with positive attributes of both the east and west. This group view themselves as engaged members of a capitalist society, who not only identify as both German and east German, but perceive their socialist upbringings to benefit them in unified Germany. Importantly, the characteristics that they attach to their identities appear to be typical of western society. Using the label of the 1970s generation, they maintain a sense of east Germanness but paint a new picture of it which is contextualised within western norms and values.

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# Table of contents

<b>Abstract</b>	1
<b>Acknowledgements</b>	2
<b>Table of contents</b>	3
<b>Introduction</b>	7
Thesis overview	14
<b>1. Views of the east: A review of existing literature</b>	21
Exploring east German identities	23
Identifying east German identities	25
The east-west distinction	25
Consumption	26
<i>Ostalgie</i>	29
The <i>Mauer im Kopf</i>	32
The <i>Zweite-Klasse-Mentalität, Trotzidentität</i> and <i>Ossi-pride</i>	34
Cultural artefacts	36
Explaining the role played by and emergence of eastern identities	38
Perspective one: East German identities are problematic for German unity	39
Perspective two: East German identities are problematic for easterners	43
Perspective three: East German identities are a healthy sign of democracy	46
Perspective four: East German identities are revealing in themselves	47
The research puzzle	51
Research questions	55
<b>2. Theorising identities: An analytical framework</b>	58
What are identities: the essentialist-constructivist debate	61
The dynamics of identities	65
Power relations	68
The different forms of categorisation in identity processes	72
Multiple identities	75
Stories, narratives and anecdotes: Negotiating identities discursively	79
I am what I shop: Negotiating identities through consumption	81
Consumption, identities and east Germanness	82
A sense of belonging and markers of distinction	85
Overcoming the complexities of consumption	87
Gift-giving	88
Conclusion	92

<b>3. Exploring identity processes: A methodological framework</b>	97
The objectives of a qualitative framework	98
Reflexivity: An integral part of the research	105
Target group: 1970s generation easterners living in Berlin	109
Interviews	113
Organising the interview	119
The design of the interview	121
Pilot interviews	121
The final interviews	124
Data analysis	130
Ethical considerations	138
Summary	138
<b>4. East is east and west is west? Perceptions of east-west difference</b>	142
Implicit understandings of east and west	144
‘Organic’ uses of east and west	145
Group one: Positioning of the self without east-west reference	146
Group two: Positioning of the self with east-west reference	147
The use of the east-west stereotype to explain others	151
Explicit understandings of east and west	155
The categorisation task	156
Group one: Intuitive understandings of east-west difference	157
Group two: Hesitant responses to the east-west distinction	157
Explicit perceptions of the east-west distinction	162
Group one: ‘There are distinct differences between the east and west’	162
Group two: ‘The east-west distinction is too simplistic’	163
Group three: ‘The east-west distinction is ignorant and out-dated’	164
Perceptions of the east-west distinction among others	165
Conclusion	167
<b>5. Not like the rest: Negotiating east Germanness through rejection</b>	169
Economic circumstances	171
Economic circumstances and perceptions of others	171
Economic circumstances and perceptions of the self	174
Consumer attitudes	178
Perceptions of the east and the positioning of the self	179
<i>Ostalgie</i>	185
<i>Ostalgie</i> and perceptions of others	188
<i>Ostalgie</i> and perceptions of the self	192

A politicised east Germanness?	195
<i>Ostalgie</i> , the self and others	198
Conclusion	199
<b>6. Growing up through unification: East Germanness as a part of Germanness</b>	202
Identifications with the east: A more socially engaged group	204
Community engagement	204
Personal relationships and career	207
Negotiating perceptions of eastern and western consumers	209
Identifications with the east: A more modest approach to shopping	212
Identifications with the west: A more sophisticated approach to shopping	214
The construction of the 1970s generation as a unique group	219
The optimum age for unification	220
The advantages of having experienced two social systems	224
Negotiating east Germanness in unified Germany	230
Conclusion	233
<b>7. Watching you, watching me: Others' perceptions in understandings of the east</b>	236
Others' perceptions of the east in unified Germany	237
Unification: A one-sided process	242
Identifications with the GDR in the context of unified Germany	246
Consumption	246
Socio-political structures	250
Acceptance of the east in unified Germany	255
Conclusion	258
<b>Conclusions</b>	261
<b>Bibliography</b>	271
<b>Appendices</b>	280
Appendix 1: Poster requesting participants (German version)	281
Appendix 2: Poster requesting participants (English version)	282
Appendix 3: Participants' backgrounds	283
Appendix 4: Interview questions (German version)	291
Appendix 5: Interview questions (English version)	293
Appendix 6: Interview activity sheet one (German version)	295
Appendix 7: Interview activity sheet one (English version)	296
Appendix 8: <i>Miele</i> advertisement	297
Appendix 9: <i>Samsung</i> advertisement	298
Appendix 10: Interview activity sheet two (German version)	299

Appendix 11: Interview activity sheet two (English version)	300
Appendix 12: Interview activity sheet three	301



## Introduction

It has been more than two decades since the Berlin Wall fell. This historic event signified the end of the socialist GDR and the beginning of the German unification process which would see the eastern population move into a capitalist society. Over twenty years later, however, the perception that easterners continue to have a distinctive cultural identity resonates in both popular and academic discourse. The vast majority of the popular depictions of the east tend to problematise eastern identity, presenting it as a sign that the inner unity of Germany has not yet been achieved and that easterners have not come to terms with life under capitalism. These sentiments came through clearly in many of the newspaper and magazine articles published to mark the twentieth anniversary of unification. A considerable number of the headlines around this time went along the lines of, 'Deutsche enttäuscht von der Wiedervereinigung' (Germans disappointed by unification) (*Welt*, 2009), or 'Mauer im Kopf: Ossi-Wessi-Vorurteile verschärft' (Wall in the head: Ossi-Wessi prejudices strengthen) (Nassoufis, *Focus*, 2009). Some were directed more explicitly towards easterners themselves, for example, 'Ostdeutsche fremdeln mit der Bundesrepublik' (Easterners are skeptical of the Federal Republic) (Hengst, *Spiegel*, 2010), and even, 'Heimweh nach der Diktatur' (Homesickness for dictatorship) (Bonstein, *Spiegel*, 2009). These examples are just a handful of the considerable number of articles published around the time of the anniversary. They indicate, however, first that the perception that the east acts as a distinctive group resonates in the German public sphere, and second that this is most often presented as a problem.

A brief historical overview of the fall of the Wall and the unification process goes some way to explain why the majority of the popular discourse about the east has developed in this way. The opening of the Berlin Wall on 9 November 1989 was the first step in what was to be an extremely rapid unification process – less than 11 months later, on 3 October 1990, Germany became a unified state. Immediately following the fall of the Wall it was unclear whether the socialist state of the GDR would undergo a slow, relatively independent reform, or whether it would be

incorporated into the Federal Republic. However, the dismal economic situation of the GDR, which continued to be intensified by the relative prosperity of the west, led to increasing levels of dissatisfaction in east Germany, thus initiating plans for the political and economic unification of the two Germanies. Otto Singer (1992) discusses the changes to the official approaches to the unification process in late 1989 and early 1990:

The thinking in official and academic circles had initially been overwhelmingly in favor of a gradual approach to reform in the GDR. [...] The perception of a deteriorating economy in the GDR and the increasing political dissatisfaction, [however], created pressure for prompt economic unification (p. 1095).

Initially, it was anticipated that east Germany would experience an economic turnaround comparable to a 'second economic miracle' following the collapse of socialism (Singer, p. 1108). However, as unemployment rose, living standards worsened and the long-established social security infrastructure of the GDR disappeared, it became clear that such a turnaround was not going to emerge quickly, if at all. Easterners became increasingly dissatisfied and anxious about the social and economic situation, as substantiated by Mary Fulbrook (2000), who affirms 'the strain of rising unemployment was compounded by uncertainty over such matters as subsidised housing and the continued existence of childcare facilities' (p. 85). Although the population of the east now possessed the freedom to access the western world of prosperity and wealth which had been beyond their reach for over forty years, they did not have the financial means necessary to be active participants within this new world. In addition to this, easterners were confronted with social inequalities and insecurities previously foreign to them; they were now vulnerable to unemployment, fluctuations in wages dictated by external economic factors and experienced far fewer welfare provisions than during the GDR era. In short, the socialist state which had ensured relative economic stability had ceased to exist, and the capitalist system now available to them continued to be unreachable in many respects as a result of financial constraints.

These factors were compounded by the poor value of GDR currency in comparison with the western Mark. It is estimated that in 1989 4.40 GDR Marks were equivalent to 1 DM (O'Dochartaigh, 2004, p. 173). Thus, even before easterners were struck with job losses and a decreased level of welfare provisions, they were in a far weaker economic position compared to their western counterparts. The monetary union, which was signed on 18 May 1990 and came into effect on 1 July of the same year, was designed to combat some of the inequalities between the east and west. In accordance with this union, salaries and savings up to the value of 4000 DM were converted at a rate of 1:1, and savings above this amount and debts at a rate of 2:1. Nevertheless, despite hopes that such a union would trigger some form of economic turnaround in the east, unemployment continued to increase. Magda Kandil (2001) claims that by February 1991 the rate of unemployment stood at 8.9%, and that 21.5% of the workforce in the former GDR was working involuntary short time (p. 267). The standard of living in the east also remained lower in comparison with the west; for example, in 1991, teachers' salaries in the East were just 60% of those in the West (O'Dochartaigh, 2004, p. 221).

In terms of psychological consequences for the eastern population, the economic situation had dire effects. Despite the collapse of socialism and the unification of Germany, easterners had not acquired the standard of living they believed corresponded with the adoption of a western economic system, and were dissatisfied with the results of the unification process. From the western point of view, the new *Länder* were often considered to be a financial burden for West Germany. Less than a year after unification a 'solidarity supplement' of 7.5% was added to income tax, designed specifically to finance unification. Although this supplement was initially only in place for one year, it was reintroduced in 1995, and remained in place well into the new millennium (O'Dochartaigh, 2004, p. 217). Generally speaking, it can be said that the huge injections of capital into the new *Länder* by west Germany contributed to sentiments of resentment among westerners towards east Germany, while the economic inequalities between the two Germanies led to feelings of inferiority and dissatisfaction in the east.

These tensions between the east and west have continued to influence the representation of east Germanness in popular discourse in unified Germany. Such representations have been heavily contested in a large proportion of the academic literature published since the fall of the Wall. Many scholars point to the media as playing a fundamental role in constructing problematic perceptions of east Germanness and reinforcing, or even contributing to the persistence of east-west differences (among others Ahbe, 2004; Boyer, 2000; Hogwood, 2001 and Neller, 2006). A recent publication by the *Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung* reports that, even two decades after unification, east Germanness continues to be depicted as an 'alterity'. It is represented as a divergence from the contemporary German norm, which is almost always presented as being synonymous with the west German system (Ahbe and Gries, 2009, p. 12). Julia Belke's contribution to the publication, which draws on a longitudinal discourse analytical study of the political magazine *Kontraste*, demonstrates that representations of east Germanness are conceived against the idea of a west German norm, and that in this conception easterners are presented as the inferior group. She claims that reports on east Germans commonly suggest

dass die Ostdeutschen sich nicht mit der Marktwirtschaft anfreunden können, dass die Ostdeutschen nicht mit Geld umgehen können, dass die Ostdeutschen undankbar sind, dass die Ostdeutschen mit der Demokratie nicht klar kommen und auch dass die Ostdeutschen zu sehr Heimat verbunden sind und nicht bereit sind einen Schritt über die "Grenzen" zu gehen (Belke, 2009, p. 175).

(that east Germans cannot get on with the market economy, that east Germans cannot manage money, that east Germans are ungrateful, that east Germans cannot get to grips with democracy and also that east Germans are too attached to *Heimat* and not prepared to step over the 'border'.)

The scholars who problematise popular representations of the east in their work raise concerns about the impact that the discourse purportedly has over eastern identity processes. They commonly argue that these negative images have led to frustration and feelings of inferiority among the eastern population which has in turn formed the basis of their east Germanness (see Blum, 2000; Charles-Ross,

2002; Flockton, 1999; Hogwood, 2000 and Theobald, 2000 among others). There are also a significant number of researchers who do not ostensibly problematise popular discourse about the east, but whose arguments actually fall in line with it. They claim that it is east Germanness itself which is problematic, that the existence of a distinctive eastern identity is a sign that German inner unity has not yet been accomplished (see Gensicke, 1995, 1998; Reißig 2000; Dorbritz, 1997 and Thierse, 2000 among others). What is more, many of these scholars infer that it is the eastern population which is responsible for the lack of German unity. They maintain that easterners have refused to move forwards into the western system, and that this has created a gap between the east and west in unified Germany (see, for example, Gensicke, 1995, 1998; Reißig 2000 and Dorbritz, 1997).

The shortcoming of both of these approaches is that neither addresses the ways that easterners themselves understand east Germanness. Focusing on dominant discourse does indeed provide valuable insights into perceptions of the east, but it does not show how individuals engage with this discourse or how it influences eastern identity processes. The idea that east Germanness presents a problem to the inner unity of Germany is also problematic – it assumes that inner unity and east Germanness cannot coexist. It seems that it would be more productive to research how easterners themselves make sense of their east Germanness in unified Germany and how this has evolved as a process. This would reveal if and how they identify with the Federal Republic. The overarching objective of this project is to address these gaps by exploring eastern identity processes.

Before explaining the project in more detail it is useful to define the key terms which are used throughout the thesis. The term ‘east Germanness’ refers to the way that the participants conceptualise what it is to be east German, or what the east means to them. ‘Identity process’ denotes the way in which the participants construct their identities – the term process has been used to reflect the ongoing nature of identity construction and the multiple factors which feed into it. The adjectives ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ are also frequently used, particularly when exploring the values and characteristics which the participants associate with different social groups. It should be noted that they denote *the participants’*

perceptions and views, so whether or not they perceive different characteristics to be desirable.

The research consists of twenty in-depth, semi-structured interviews with easterners who were born in the 1970s and currently live in Berlin. This generation were on the cusp of adulthood when unification took place, and have therefore constructed their adult identities during unification and in unified Germany. The plethora of autobiographical texts which this age group has published since unification suggests, however, that this group continues to define itself by its GDR past.<sup>1</sup> The thesis therefore intended to reveal if and how this group identifies with the east, and how they negotiate mainstream perceptions of the new *Länder* in their identity processes. The research was designed as a small-scale, in-depth study in order to ensure that it would bring the complexities of identity processes to light. Berlin was selected as a useful location to carry out the research, as the city itself was divided into east and west during the Cold War. It is therefore very much defined by unification and is a site where a large degree of east-west interaction takes place.

The interviews explore how the participants engage with dominant discourse when discursively constructing their self-perceptions and perceptions of others. This, in turn, reveals whether they hold 'alternative' understandings of east Germanness which are not represented by current discourses. Addressing the ways that easterners themselves negotiate and understand east Germanness also explains what shapes their identities, that is to say the roles that both their pre- and post-unification experiences have had in their understandings. The interviews focus on perceptions of the east in the context of unified Germany, which means they take a pluralist perspective to bring to light how the participants conceptualise and identify with the Federal Republic.

The project takes a constructivist perspective and adopts a qualitative, interpretive methodology. This enables it to get to grips with the intricate complexities which make up these individuals' perceptions. In line with

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<sup>1</sup> Some examples of these texts are: Jakob Hein (2001) *Mein erstes T-Shirt*, Jana Hensel (2002) *Zonenkinder* (Reinbek: Rowohlt) and Claudia Rusch (2003) *Meine freie deutsche Jugend*.

constructivist theories of identity, it accounts for the contextual and continuously shifting nature of identity processes. The interview material is analysed using a combination of critical and linguistic discourse analysis. These analytical methods shed light on the ways in which the participants discursively construct their perceptions, as well as how the power dynamics between the participants' perceptions and dominant discourses shift in their identity processes. Using this approach to explore east Germanness revealed new insights in three main ways. First, it enabled me to differentiate between the different discourses which feed into identity processes. Second, it demonstrated the different roles played by the discourses when the participants articulate different types of perceptions. These were perceptions of the self, perceptions of those with whom the participant has personal contact and perceptions of a generic group whom they have never met. Third, it revealed both the implicit and explicit ways that the participants dealt with the discourse when discussing these different perceptions. A further aim of the interviews was to encourage the participants to position themselves between the past and the present. The findings therefore also show how the participants conceptualise and engage with their GDR past in the context of the present.

The findings of the study make a valuable and original contribution to the field of east German studies in two ways. First, they build upon arguments made in existing research, offering a more in-depth understanding of the dynamics which are frequently said to feed into eastern identities. They shed further light onto the question of the east-west distinction, highlighting that it is not as clear-cut as often suggested. As anticipated, the ways that it was used to make sense of difference shifted depending on the discursive context. The findings have also provided new insights into how different discourses about the east feed into broader identity processes. In brief, it appears that the participants do not identify with the majority of the existing discourses, and often go to great lengths to distance themselves from negative perceptions in their narratives about the self. It seems that the participants struggle to voice their understandings in contemporary Germany because there is no discourse which encapsulates their perceptions. The existing discourses do, however, play a key role in the ways that

the participants make sense of other easterners. The interviews also revealed the positive identifications that the participants make in their identity processes. In line with existing research, these can be summarised as the perception that easterners place more importance on social solidarity than westerners. What the findings show, however, is the exact characteristics relating to social solidarity that the participants identify with, and, importantly, how they present the east and west when discussing each characteristic.

The second way in which the research contributes to the field of east German studies is by providing new insights into the construction of east Germanness. The most important findings here relate to understandings of generation. This was key to the participants' identity processes. They used it as a tool to distance themselves from negative perceptions of the east and identify with positive perceptions of the west as well as to identify 1970s generation easterners as a unique and special group in unified Germany. In short, by engaging with generation the participants are able to maintain a sense of east Germanness, but to carve out an identity within this label which better fits their understandings. Looking closely at the full picture that they construct in their identity processes reveals that their self-perceptions are in fact characteristically western. They are keen to identify themselves as easterners, and do not appear to be comfortable to explicitly associate themselves with 'western' characteristics. However, looking at the meanings that they attach to the east German label shows that their self-perceptions fit neatly into the capitalist context of unified Germany.

### **Thesis overview**

The main body of the thesis is divided into seven chapters. The first three chapters outline the overarching structure of the project, consisting of a review of existing literature in the field of east German studies and the theoretical and methodological frameworks for the study. The final four chapters analyse the findings of the research. They have been structured primarily as a reflection of the participants' discursive identity processes. Chapter four explores discursive



practices to reveal perceptions of the east-west distinction. This is central to understandings of east Germanness and consistently framed the participants' perceptions throughout the interviews. It is for this reason that it was selected as the theme for the first empirical chapter. Chapter five explores the perceptions which the participants reject and chapter six those with which they identify with in their identity processes. Both chapters address the ways that the participants deal with different perceptions when talking about themselves and others. Taken together, these two chapters provide a full picture of the participants' east German perceptions. The final empirical chapter focuses on how the participants believe that they are perceived by others, namely by the west. Others' perceptions of the east are highly influential in the participants' self presentations. This set of findings is analysed at the end of the thesis because it brings together the self-perceptions which are explored in chapters five and six and explores how these alter in the broader context of unified Germany.

The literature review explores the patterns within existing research on east Germanness. It identifies the most prevalent arguments regarding how eastern identities present themselves in contemporary Germany, where this post-unification east Germanness is deemed to have come from and the role that it is considered to play in terms of inner German unity. Reviewing existing research reveals the under-researched areas in the field and the implicit assumptions which shape current research approaches, and thus forms the basis for the overarching aims and research questions for this thesis. The main themes that are addressed are consumption, discourses considered to be central to popular understandings of the east, such as *Ostalgie* and popular perceptions of easterners in a capitalist context, and ideas about the inferiority complex which is said to characterise east Germanness. The chapter also shows that taking a qualitative and more open and reflexive approach to studying eastern identity processes could address, and even allay, existing concerns that east Germanness jeopardises inner German unity. It paves the way for a more in-depth study of eastern identities to reveal the complex and nuanced ways in which easterners negotiate their east Germanness in the context of unified Germany.

The following chapter outlines the theoretical framework for the thesis, which is designed to fulfil the need to gain in-depth insights into the complexities of eastern identity processes. The first half of the chapter explains that constructivism makes for the most productive approach, as it brings to light the ways in which identities continuously shift according to social context. Exploring constructivist theories also reveals, however, that identity studies is a highly complex field. In order to construct a workable theoretical framework, it is necessary to break down the social contexts in which identity processes take place and the different types of social categorisation which feed into them. This ensures that the interviews are designed to differentiate between perceptions of the self, of those with whom the participant has personal contact and of a generic group whom the participant has never met. Having broken down different types of social interaction, it is possible to explore how individuals and discourse interact, and how these processes shift in different contexts. Overall, this framework enables the study to provide a fuller picture of the complex and differentiated nature of eastern identity processes. The second half of the chapter focuses on the ways that individuals present their perceptions in the social sphere. These are important, as they provide a window into identity processes, or a means of understanding them. The analysis here pinpoints discursiveness and consumption as the most appropriate windows into eastern identity processes. Exploring how the participants linguistically construct their narratives reveals where they socially position themselves and others. It also brings to light the nuances in their perceptions – the strength of their language or the amount of hesitation in their narrative, for example, provides important insights into their implicit understandings.

Consumption was selected as a means for understanding eastern identity processes for two reasons. First, it is commonly accepted to be central to self-presentations in capitalist societies. Second, it is a social practice which existed in the GDR and plays an important role in unified Germany, but the norms and values surrounding the practice have changed greatly since unification. It therefore not only addresses the ways in which the participants perceive

themselves and others in the capitalist context of the Federal Republic, but also how they position themselves between the past and present. Research into theories of consumption reveals, however, that it is an extremely broad area where a large number of variables are at play. When incorporating consumption into a research project, then, it is necessary to specify a particular consumer practice to ensure consistency in the findings. Gift-giving was selected as an appropriate type of consumption for this study. It carries the same advantages as consumption, as it is a practice which exists under socialism and capitalism. Furthermore, it is an extremely common consumer practice, so it is likely that all of the participants will engage in it in some way. Most important, however, is that the values which differentiate people who place more importance on the thought and time invested in a gift and people who prioritise economic value are comparable to the values which are said to differentiate the east and west.

The third chapter outlines the methodological framework for the project, building upon the theories explained in chapter two. It begins by explaining how a qualitative, interpretive approach fulfils the objectives of this project, ensuring that it gains an in-depth understanding of the complexities of the participants' identity process. It then moves on to look at the importance of a reflexive approach in making the findings of this study valid and reliable. It takes account of my role as a researcher, the way that I was likely to have been perceived by the participants and how their narratives may have been shaped by the interview process. Explicitly discussing these issues acknowledges the limitations of the project, and ultimately reveals the insights that it brings to the field of east German studies. The chapter then explains the rationale for selecting the target group for the study, namely 1970s generation easterners living in Berlin. Members of this generation have firsthand experiences of the GDR, but have spent the majority, if not all of their adult lives in unified Germany. In addition, they live in Berlin, a city which is frequently characterised by unification and in which east-west interaction is an everyday occurrence. The remainder of the chapter outlines the methods that were used during data collection and data analysis. It clarifies why in-depth, semi-structured interviews were selected as an

appropriate method, and the measures that were taken to ensure they fulfilled the aims of the project, but did not pre-empt the participants' responses. The framework for analysing the data combined critical discourse analysis with linguistic discourse analysis. This had two purposes; first, it enabled me to explore how dominant perceptions of the east fed into the participants' perceptions. Second, it facilitated the examination of how the participants use language to negotiate this discourse and construct their own understandings of east Germanness. Taking these methods together, then, ensured that the interviews would address the research questions for the project.

The thesis then turns to look at the findings of the empirical research for the project. The fourth chapter focuses on the idea of an east-west distinction. This theme resonated in the interviews – the participants' understandings of social difference and perceptions of east Germanness were consistently framed by the idea of an east-west distinction. The findings revealed, however, that the distinction is not as straightforward as is often suggested in existing literature. The participants' perceptions of east-west difference shift depending on whom they are discussing, and they frequently assert sameness as well as difference when discussing the two groups in their narratives. There are numerous tensions between the participants' implicit and explicit understandings of the east-west distinction. Although the majority explicitly distanced their own perceptions from it, the idea of east-west difference framed their implicit understandings.

The fifth chapter explores the popular ideas about the east which the participants reject in their identity processes. Following on from the previous chapter, the analysis shows that the participants' perceptions are framed by the idea of an east-west distinction. They consistently distinguish between the two groups, either implicitly or explicitly, and thus affirm the distinction. What they do reject, however, is the simplicity of the labels. They draw on distinctive sets of perceptions to add depth and explanation to the groups. The perceptions that they engage with correspond to popular ideas about the east. They are economic circumstances, consumer attitudes and *Ostalgie*. Looking at how they feed into the participants' self-perceptions and the ways that they see other easterners

highlights the influence that these perceptions have. It also shows, however, that each set of perceptions plays a different role in their understandings. The more threatened the participants' feel by the perceptions, the greater the lengths they go to in order to discursively distance themselves from them. In some cases, they go as far as using generation and geographical location to differentiate the east, constructing a subgroup consisting of older generations who live outside of Berlin. They then assign the negative perceptions of the east to this group, thus ensuring that they are not pigeonholed by them.

The thesis then moves on to look at the positive identifications that the participants make in their identity processes. Chapter six shows that the participants associate themselves with perceived eastern and western characteristics, and also identify easterners from the 1970s generation as a unique group in itself. They all expressed a sense of collective east Germanness in their narratives, claiming that, as easterners, they are more socially engaged than westerners. They also asserted that they were more modest consumers than their western counterparts. When it came to consumption, however, the participants did not only identify with the east. They also associated themselves with perceived western characteristics, labelling themselves as sophisticated and experienced shoppers. The ways that the participants located themselves according to different consumer perceptions and the subsequent picture that they paint of themselves as consumers is also explored in this chapter. It shows that they use generation to construct a group who are experienced in the ways of capitalism, but also reap the benefits of having lived in a socialist system, such as consumer modesty. Generation is also key to their self-presentations as a unique group, where they identify specifically as 1970s generation easterners. They claim that they are more open-minded, objective and engaged citizens in Germany because they have experienced two systems, and were at the optimum age when unification took place. Taking together the perceptions which the participants identify with and distance themselves from provides an overall picture of their self-perceptions.

The final chapter addresses how the participants believe that they are perceived by others, namely the west, in unified Germany, and the ways that this influences their self-presentations. According to the participants, the east, as well as the eastern population, is largely viewed in a negative light. The participants express frustration about these perceived perceptions, explaining that they consider themselves to have benefited from their GDR experiences, and what is more, that these attributes are advantageous in unified Germany. In fact, the participants do not only believe that their experiences hold them in good stead in contemporary Germany, but also that the GDR had positive features which would have benefited the Federal Republic. They claim that contemporary Germany should have adopted the modest approach to consumption which existed in the GDR, as well as some of its socio-political structures, particularly when it comes to state provisions. What is important, however, is that their assertions are embroiled in the perception that they will be negatively judged for showing any preference for socialism. On a more positive note, the participants also claim that perceptions of the east have become less negative in the twenty years since unification, and that they find it easier to have their opinions heard in one-to-one interaction with westerners.

## **Chapter One**

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### **Views of the east: A review of existing literature**

Since the Berlin Wall fell in 1989, a considerable amount of academic literature on the development of east German identities since unification has been published. This vast body of literature is rich in diversity and provides various explanations for the existence of eastern identities, about how east Germanness can be characterised and about its role in the context of unified Germany. This chapter aims to identify the key differences within this proliferation of academic texts. It focuses on how different scholars explore east German identities and the subsequent conclusions that they draw with regard to east Germanness. Reviewing the literature therefore demonstrates the academic arguments most commonly made in existing publications, and how these have been shaped by the researchers' approaches. It also brings to light questions about eastern identity processes which have not yet been addressed by researchers in the field. It is these under-researched areas which form the basis of the research questions for this thesis. As shown in the final section of this chapter, these are designed to offer a new perspective on eastern identity processes. They are intended to provide deeper insights into claims made in existing research, as well as to reveal aspects of east Germanness which have been overlooked by the research approaches currently used in the field.

The chapter analyses how different academics explore and identify east Germanness and the explanations that they propose for its existence, its role in unified Germany and the ways that it is expressed. Scholars who suggest similar reasons for the emergence of an eastern identity often go on to have similar views regarding the role played by that identity in unified Germany. The same crossovers do not apply when examining the different ways in which academics claim that eastern identity can be identified. While many scholars examine the same form of eastern identity, they often go on to draw different conclusions about the reasons it exists and the role it plays. The existence of such parallels

and crossovers has largely dictated the structure of this chapter. The first section focuses on how different academics in the field explore east German identities, ranging from cultural studies and theoretical work on east Germanness to quantitative and anthropological research projects. Acknowledging the diversity of scholarly approaches in this field provides insights into the different research aims, and ultimately their findings. The second section analyses the various ways in which scholars claim eastern identities can be identified. The whole of this body of literature is underpinned by the idea of the east-west distinction, so that east German identities are distinctive from west German identities. The distinction consistently provides a basis for research in the field. However, the precise ways in which different scholars identify an east German identity can be broken down into five groups: consumer practices, *Ostalgie*, the *Mauer im Kopf*, the *zweite-Klasse-Mentalität* and *Ossi-pride* and the emergence of literature and films focusing on east Germanness. Understanding the prevalence of these themes reveals how east Germanness has been characterised in contemporary Germany, thereby opening up research avenues to new insights about the identity. The third section addresses how different academics explain the emergence of east Germanness and the role it plays in contemporary Germany, focusing predominantly on how implicit assumptions on the part of researchers shape their findings. These assumptions shape the perspective from which researchers perceive eastern identities. Four different perspectives can be identified in the body of existing literature. The first three embody relatively more predetermined ideas about the role that eastern identities *should* play. They are: the view that eastern identities are problematic for German unity, the idea that they are problematic for easterners themselves and the perspective that they are actually a sign of healthy democracy. The fourth perspective focuses less on the role that eastern identities should play, instead exploring their nature and construction in order to reveal how individuals manage social change. Recognising the tacit ideas behind existing assertions on east Germanness reveals the need for reflexive research in this field in order to formulate more progressive conclusions. The final section outlines the research questions for this project.



These are formulated with the need for a fresh approach incorporating reflexivity in mind, and take into account the way that east Germanness has so far been characterised in unified Germany. They are intended to explore how individuals respond to and engage with the current characterisation of east Germanness. This approach also reveals east German understandings which are not represented in existing literature.

### **Exploring east German identities**

The first distinctions to be made between different scholarly groups relates to how they explore east Germanness. Most scholars in the field base their findings on either broad social ideas and economic trends or cultural representations; the number which focuses on primary research involving easterners themselves, whether qualitative or quantitative, is comparatively small. For purposes of identification, academics focusing on social and economic trends or cultural representations will be described as taking an 'indirect' research approach, as they do not directly engage with easterners in their work. Broadly speaking, these academics analyse the characteristics popularly associated with east Germanness in contemporary Germany, focusing on a sense of belonging to a distinctive east German group, feelings of dissatisfaction about life in unified Germany, and the ways in which easterners remember and regard the GDR. By examining these areas, academics illuminate the possible reasons for the emergence of an eastern identity and its role in contemporary Germany.

A smaller group of researchers have taken a 'direct' approach in their research, where they focus on data which stems directly from easterners themselves. The majority have carried out quantitative empirical research in this area, or draw heavily on quantitative empirical studies by research organisations in Germany. These scholars include Gordon Charles-Ross (2002), Jürgen Dorbritz (1997) and Thomas Gensicke (1995, 1998). Their findings highlight trends among the population of the new *Länder*, focusing primarily on a common value system among easterners during the time of transition. Unlike those taking an 'indirect'

approach, these scholars analyse social trends within the population, rather than focusing on popular discourse and cultural artefacts. There is also a far smaller group of researchers in this field who carry out qualitative research, which would also be described as a 'direct' approach. Anthropologists such as Anselma Gallinat (2006, 2009) Elizabeth A. Ten Dyke (2000) and Daphne Berdahl (1999a, 1999b, 2000, 2001) are quite distinctive in terms of their methodological approaches. They tend to employ ethnography and in-depth interviews in order to understand the intricate details of the everyday lives of individuals, and the interplay between the present and the past in the continuous rearticulation of one's identity. This group does not focus on the implications of eastern identities for united Germany, but rather explores how easterners themselves negotiated the transformation process. As a result of their qualitative approach, these scholars provide a more in-depth analysis of east Germanness than other scholars in the field. However, although they carry out small-scale research, they rarely focus on a specific demographic group. Berdahl, for example, has published considerable amounts about a case study that she undertook in Kella, a borderland village in the former GDR (1999a). The fieldwork for this project, in line with qualitative methodologies, consisted of ethnography, including participant observation and in-depth interviews, carried out within Kella over a period of two years. As an in-depth and small-scale project, it shed light on some of the complexities which made up identity processes during this time of transition. Nevertheless, Berdahl, like the majority of researchers who take this perspective, included all of the demographic groups within this village in her project. She therefore did not reveal any in-depth insights into specific subgroups of easterners. Researchers who do differentiate the east in their research almost always focus on victims or dissidents of the SED (see, for example, Gallinat, 2006; 2009), rather than easterners who consider themselves to have had little engagement with the SED or Stasi in the GDR, and, on the whole, to have led a 'normal' life. This literature review has not, therefore, revealed any research which uses qualitative methods to explore how a specific demographic

experienced 'normal' everyday life in the GDR, and now make sense of east Germanness in unified Germany.

## **Identifying east German identities**

### The east-west distinction

The idea of an east-west distinction is central to all academic research into east German identities. Whether or not the distinction is addressed explicitly by the researcher depends on the precise focus of their work, as explained below. However, it consistently, either implicitly or explicitly, forms the basis for the whole body of literature in the field. Perceptions that easterners have a distinctive identity are based on the notion that it is distinguishable from west Germanness. The following quotation from Dominic Boyer, an anthropologist, nicely summarises the key issues raised in the field. He claims:

Whether indexed in informal discussions among friends, overheard on subway cars, or encountered in newspaper headlines, "East German" and "West German" identities and alterities are signified ubiquitously, and their validity as a logic of distinction is never publicly contested (2000, p. 463).

The first point made by Boyer relates to the distinction that is made between the east and the west. He suggests that east and west Germanness are formed in opposition to one another, and thus that easterners understand their identities as being distinctive from west German identifications, and vice versa. Ultimately, this means that east and west Germanness are seen as polar opposites in contemporary Germany. Second, his claim that 'their validity as a logic of distinction is never publicly contested' indicates that this distinction is anchored so deeply in popular perceptions that it is accepted without question as fact.

The newspaper headlines which were cited in the introduction to the thesis demonstrate the prevalence of the east and west as social categories in unified Germany.<sup>2</sup> They are commonly used to explain public statistics and in mass

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<sup>2</sup> See p. 7.

communication about cultural, economic and political trends (Manfred Schmitt and Jürgen Maes, 2002, p. 310). Reviewing existing literature on east Germanness reveals, however, that the distinction is not only 'anchored' in popular representations of the east, but also in academic work on the subject. The dominance of the distinction in existing research is demonstrated in each of the following sections, which address the five main ways that east German identities are identified by scholars in the field.

### Consumption

A considerable number of researchers identify the existence of an eastern identity through developments in consumer behaviour. The significance of consumption to the study of eastern identities can be explained by its relevance first to the transition that easterners made from a socialist to a capitalist society, and second to the negotiation of identities in contemporary society. It is for these reasons that this thesis has two sections dedicated to the issue of consumption. The first, which follows below, focuses specifically on academic literature which draws on consumption in order to gain insights into east Germany.<sup>3</sup> Analysing this literature reveals how the study of consumption has been used to understand east Germanness until now, and therefore outlines the existing research in the field to which this thesis will contribute. The second section, which is a part of the theoretical framework for the chapter, focuses on the broader use of consumption theory to explore identity processes (see pp. 81-92).

Consumption is central to the work of anthropological researchers such as Ten Dyke (2000) and Berdahl (1999a, 1999b, 2000, 2001), as well as for scholars such as Jonathan Bach (2002), Laurence McFalls (2002), Martin Blum (2000) and Helen Kelly-Holmes (2000), who focus on broader consumer trends. A crucial

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<sup>3</sup> The focus of this section of the literature review is research which has been published about the transition from socialism to capitalism and a post-unification east German consumer identity. Texts which look specifically at consumerism in the GDR have not been included here, as they are quite distinctive from the body of literature which focuses on post-unification east Germanness. They have been referred to throughout the thesis to clarify participants' narratives about their GDR experiences.

consideration here is the significance of consumption under socialism and the continued importance of this in a market economy. In their ethnographic work on the developments of consumerism in the transition from socialism to postsocialism, Jennifer Patico and Melissa L. Caldwell (2002) assert that under socialism 'consumerism [...] was key in state efforts to cultivate and enforce public mores and to regulate the most intimate spaces of daily life' (p. 287). Consumables were extremely limited in the GDR, and as a consequence, consumer opportunities were largely dictated by social connections and cooperation, where individuals relied on useful contacts to acquire consumer goods. In her comprehensive work on consumption in the GDR, Ina Merkel points out that, 'in dealing with scarcity, citizens of the GDR developed a wealth of inventions, the ability to improvise, mutually supportive behaviour, patience and frugality' (1998, p. 284). Therefore, the social norms, and in particular the sense of community upon which consumer practices under socialism were constructed is quite converse to individualistic consumerism in the west. Despite this, however, it is important to bear in mind that the restricted consumer practices of the socialist state were magnified by the wealth of products available in the capitalist Federal Republic. Merkel notes that 'the specificity of this [GDR consumer] culture was shaped by continual East-West discourse' (p. 282). Unification, then, saw easterners become a part of a consumer culture which was not only entirely different from that in the GDR, but also one with which their own consumer culture had been continually compared during the forty years of the GDR's existence. It is not surprising, therefore, that the transition from a socialist to a capitalist consumer culture required a great mentality shift from the eastern population. Patico and Caldwell recognise this in their work, claiming that integral to acclimatising to a market economy is the 'reformulation of what it means to be an individual and a citizen in the new nation' (p. 288). According to this perspective, then, following unification, easterners were not only faced with the task of familiarising themselves with the vast choice of brands available and the connotations associated with these, but also understanding the different social role played by consumer practices in a market economy. The social

interaction and solidarity which defined consumerism in the GDR were replaced with expectations to use consumables to fulfil personal desires and construct a self-image.

Numerous academics claim that, as a response to the shift in consumer practices and the sudden availability of a vast range of products, the time immediately following the fall of the Wall was largely characterised by the frenzied buying of western products by easterners. Paul Betts (2000), who explores social change through broader patterns in material culture, states that '1989 was often interpreted as simply the desire to enjoy long sought Western goods after years of consumer frustration' (p. 741). Forty years of extremely limited consumer choice, combined with continuous intimations, through media such as western television, that western products were superior, apparently culminated in a rush to indulge in new-found consumer opportunities. The real magnitude of this supposed spree, however, should not be assumed. While it is clear that there was a shift in eastern consumer behaviour during the unification process, it is necessary to consider the role of media representations in defining perceptions of this period. The extent to which easterners initially embraced western goods is therefore difficult to ascertain. This does not, however, reduce the importance of these media representations when it comes to understanding east Germanness. Popular representations contribute significantly to easterners' identity processes, as is addressed in the theoretical framework for this thesis. Therefore, these media representations, regardless of their accuracy, must be taken into account when exploring how easterners make sense of east Germanness.

The scholars working on changes in eastern consumer behaviour claim that this trend was rather short-lived. In her work on consumer trends in the east, Patricia Hogwood (2001) suggests that the population of the new *Länder* had turned their interests to eastern products as early as 1991 (p. 76). This view is substantiated by Andreas Staab in his research on east Germany and German national identity (1997), where he reports that, 'in December 1991, almost three-quarters out of a total 100 surveyed households deliberately preferred Eastern over Western products' (p. 145). Staab goes on to offer an explanation for this turnaround,

claiming that east Germans' consumer preferences were largely determined by the 'bitter aftertaste' caused by harsher aspects of a market economy (ibid). A common assertion among academics is that the reality of the Federal Republic did not live up to pre-unification expectations, and that, on experiencing the harsh reality of capitalism, many easterners returned their interests to eastern goods.

Crucial to note here is that easterners appear to have quickly adopted a fundamentally capitalist notion of consumption, irrelevant of whether the focus of this was eastern or western goods. The apparent shift of consumer interests from western to eastern goods in the 1990s suggests the existence of a level of consumer autonomy, which did not exist in the GDR. It seems, therefore, that easterners rapidly acclimatised to the different social meaning of consumer practices.

In summary, unification and the time thereafter appear to have been largely defined by consumer practices. The transformation from a socialist system, characterised by restricted consumer opportunities which necessitated a cooperative approach to consumption, to a capitalist society, in which individualistic consumerism is a fundamental feature, was bound to yield changes in the consumer culture of easterners. Importantly, the unification process and the east are also often characterised by consumer practices in media representations. Questions about how the dominance of these images in the public sphere feed into easterners' perceptions of east Germanness are therefore explored throughout this thesis in order to gain insights into how east Germanness is constructed.

### *Ostalgie*

The role of consumption is also central to *Ostalgie*, which is the key focus for scholars exploring the development of a cultural eastern identity, as well as those who focus on the political implications of east Germanness. The idea of *Ostalgie*, a portmanteau of the words 'Ost' (east) and 'Nostalgie' (nostalgia), essentially

describes sentiments of nostalgia for GDR life. Critical Studies scholar Blum (2000) claims that the expression *Ostalgie* 'extends the denotation of origins and identities into a mentality that describes a profound notion of loss, and the attempts to come to terms with this' (p. 230). The definition of *Ostalgie* is, however, quite contentious. Since the term was coined in the 1990s it has been ascribed with a range of meanings. For example, it is associated with the rather kitsch GDR-nostalgia shows on television as well as the emergence of so-called 'Ost-Shops', selling a range of GDR memorabilia. As a result of connections with quite garish television programs and products, this term now holds somewhat derogatory and dismissive connotations, which appear to distort many understandings of east Germanness.

Such a characterisation of eastern cultural identity raises questions about why it is so strongly associated with nostalgia. As noted in the previous section, numerous academics assert that easterners were stung and disillusioned during the transition into a consumer society. The individualistic, competitive and at times ruthless nature of capitalism is deemed to have been unanticipated by many easterners, and provoked a sense of longing for the familiarity of socialist culture. The abrupt changes of unification and the introduction a completely different system, where easterners are perceived to have felt like the underdog, appear to have heightened reminiscence about the everyday of the GDR. The majority of the population of the new *Länder* were well-acquainted with the socialist system and had the skills required to manoeuvre within it, which did not correspond to the system in unified Germany. Furthermore, unification resulted in the rapid loss of much of the regional cultural landscape of the GDR, which is likely to have strengthened the desire to preserve the cultural identity of the GDR. The reasons for the characterisation of east Germanness as *nostalgic* are important to the understanding of popularised representations of east Germanness, which are in turn significant to how easterners construct their self-perceptions.

*Ostalgie* is inherently linked to practices and rituals of consumption, which constitute the primary way in which such sentiments are expressed. The



researchers who have been categorised as focusing on *Ostalgie* in this literature review, such as Paul Cooke (2005), Rolf Reißig (2000) and John Theobald (2000), differ from the 'consumption' group because they tend to focus on the sentiments associated with *Ostalgie*, as opposed to the consumer behaviour linked to the phenomenon. When outlining his research on popular representations of the east, Theobald asserts that:

The overwhelming consensual trend since 1990 has been to discredit the memory of the GDR and to diminish respect for all that it – and that includes its people – set out to realize in its 40 years of existence. When alternatives to this approach are advanced, they are – 'on message' with hegemonic discourse – generally dismissed as *Ostalgie* or as irrelevant and unrealistic speculation (p. 131).

It is clear from this quotation that the focus of Theobald's research is the concept of *Ostalgie* itself, and moreover its role in Germany. He critically analyses the problematic negative images of the east which dominate the public sphere in unified Germany, claiming that *Ostalgie* constitutes a further strand to this problematic discourse. It serves as a means of dismissing 'positive' ideas about the east, which may counteract the dominant negative perceptions. He is concerned with the denigration of an eastern identity through the label of *Ostalgie*, rather than how *Ostalgie* is identifiable, such as through modes of consumption. Nevertheless, it should not be assumed that the distinction between scholars working on consumption and *Ostalgie* is unequivocal; there are numerous crossovers between the two groups and the majority of scholars acknowledge multiple modes of expression for eastern identity, as demonstrated by the following sections in this chapter. The categories provided here offer clarification about how different scholars identify an eastern identity and what they prioritise in their research. Therefore, while those mentioned here focus predominantly on either consumption or *Ostalgie*, they also acknowledge the inherent links between the two.

Like Theobald, many of the scholars working on *Ostalgie* agree that it portrays east Germanness as a problematic identity. Social scientist Thomas Ahbe also

problematizes the discourse for precisely this reason, pointing out that stigmatisation is a common thread which runs through all of the definitions. He claims '[der] stigmatisierende Sinn von 'Ostalgie' ist einer der wenigen Konsistenzen in der Begriffsnutzung' (the stigmatising meaning of *Ostalgie* is one of the only consistencies in the use of the term) (1999, p. 87). Ahbe elaborates on the nature of this stigmatisation, suggesting that *Ostalgie* hangs together with ideas of degradation, out-datedness and futility (ibid). Its kitsch manifestations in the form of GDR memorabilia and associations with a backward-looking longing for the GDR set the stage for popular understandings of east Germanness in unified Germany.

According to this perspective then, processes of remembering the positive aspects of the GDR in the public sphere are often negatively pigeonholed as *Ostalgie*, even when the term does not accurately represent them. This means there is little opportunity for understandings of east Germanness which challenge the negative perceptions of the east to emerge in the public sphere. Therefore, easterners' attempts to challenge negative perceptions of the east may be thwarted by *Ostalgie*, which is likely to misconstrue their positive identifications with the past as unrealistic and backward-looking.

### The *Mauer im Kopf*

A further common way of identifying east Germanness is to focus on the idea of the *Mauer im Kopf*, or the 'wall in the head'. The research on this concept is comparable to all existing academic literature on east Germanness, as it is underlined by the idea of the east-west distinction. What sets those focusing on the *Mauer im Kopf* apart from other scholars is their more explicit focus on the apparent division between the east and west. The scholars who take this concept as their starting point tend to work in the field of political sciences, for example Thomas Gensicke (1998), Dietrich Mühlberg (1999) and Wolfgang Thierse (2000), former president of the German *Bundestag* who has published on unity and division since unification. They claim that the existence of a divide in mentalities

between the east and the west demonstrates continued sentiments of east Germanness.

The term *Mauer im Kopf* was coined in the early 1990s and refers to the mental block which has supposedly continued to divide east and west Germans since unification. The concept has proved central to many research projects in this field and has therefore become widely recognised. Richard Schröder's (1999) description of the term reveals the connotations associated with it: 'Die Mauer mit Stacheldraht und Minen, die war ja schnell weggeräumt, aber die Mauer in den Köpfen, an der scheitert's' (pp. 218-219) (The wall made of barbed wire and mortar, that was quick to remove, but the wall in the heads, that's where it will fail). This definition suggests that the *Mauer im Kopf* will not only be difficult to overcome, but also that its existence is problematic in terms of German unity.

The metaphorical meaning of the concept sheds light on some of the assumptions among scholars who focus on the *Mauer im Kopf*. The use of the term 'wall' implies the existence of a physical entity, rather than a mentality. This, in turn, suggests that the divide between the old and new *Länder* can be removed relatively easily, while in reality the process of coming to terms with such significant social changes is bound to extend over a considerable period of time. Memories and the experiences of both socialisation in the GDR and the rather turbulent unification process cannot simply be erased and forgotten, as a physical entity can. Furthermore, it should be noted that a wall is a man-made construction, which, in the context of the *Mauer im Kopf*, implies that the divide between the east and the west has been fabricated intentionally. This idea corresponds with the arguments of academics such as Geniscke (1995, 1998), who appears to apportion much of the responsibility for the lack of integration between the old and new *Länder* to easterners, who he claims have failed to embrace a market economy.<sup>4</sup> The metaphorical suggestion that the *Mauer im Kopf* is man-made does not acknowledge the likely existence of postsocialist continuities within contemporary Germany, or the implications of external

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<sup>4</sup> See pp. 39-42 for further analysis on this point.

factors, such as widespread economic issues. These arguments are explained in more depth in the following section, which focuses on whether different scholars problematise an eastern identity and why. The main point here is that the aforementioned academics consider the divide between the east and west to be evidence of a separate eastern identity.

The concept of the *Mauer im Kopf* is useful in providing an understanding of the scholars who focus on it in their research. Taken at face value, it explains their perception that there is an ongoing divide between the east and the west. After exploring the metaphorical meaning of the term, it can be seen that the concept also embodies many of the problematic aspects of the assertions made by the group. Not only does it imply that the psychological impact of forty years of a divided Germany and unification can simply be forgotten, it also suggests that the mentality has been constructed deliberately, thus failing to take the impact of external factors into account.

#### The *Zweite-Klasse-Mentalität*, *Trotzidentität* and *Ossi pride*

The researchers focusing on the *Mauer im Kopf* are not alone in explicitly taking the apparent division between the east and west as the starting point for their work. The second body of literature which explores the east-west division proposes that contemporary eastern identity is defined primarily through social inequality in comparison to the west, and moreover through the sentiments of inferiority associated with social exclusion. These scholars do not, therefore, hold easterners responsible for the division, but hold the division accountable for the existence of an inferiority complex in the east. Included among these scholars are Chris Flockton (1999), who explores economic trends, and Gordon Charles-Ross (2002), who focuses on minority voices in Germany. This inferiority complex is often described as a *zweite-Klasse-Mentalität* (second-class mentality) (see, for example, Charles-Ross, 2002), a useful term which corresponds well to this strand of thought.

According to Flockton (1999), 'east Germany remains dogged by an under-performing economy and ravaged by unemployment' (p. 3). The practical inequalities between the east and the west are not only the causes of the emergence of an eastern identity for these scholars, but also constitute the primary way in which it is characterised. Being unemployed, for example, not only affects perceptions of the self, but also how individuals present themselves and are identified by others. The way in which easterners are typically perceived interacts with the way in which they view themselves, culminating in the construction of their east Germanness. The significant gap between the social status of the average easterner and the average westerner constitutes the main difference between them for these academics, and subsequently evidence of a separate eastern identity. Flockton demonstrates this in her claim that, as a result of the unequal social circumstances of easterners and westerners, east Germany has created a 'problem-laden and unsettled identity of its own' (p. 2). So, according to this group, the evidence of a separate eastern identity can be seen in two ways. First, in the sense that the east is inferior to the west when it comes to the economy, and second that the east perceives itself and is perceived to be inferior to the west.

Many of the scholars who identify the idea of a *zwiete-Klasse-Mentalität* in their work go on to claim that sentiments of inferiority have led to an eastern *Trotzidentität*, an identity of defiance or contrariness. This is considered as a response to the western dominance of the unification process and the subsequent belittling of the east in unified Germany, as Hogwood explains:

From a western perspective, the cultural learning process within united Germany is assumed to be unidirectional. The elites and public of the west do not believe they have anything to learn from the GDR's cultural experience – if they so much as consider such a possibility. In reaction, some East Germans have retreated into a bitter, sulky *Trotzidentität* (identity of contrariness), a victim mentality which helps to justify their reputation as 'whingeing Osis' (*Jammer-Osis*) (2000, p. 58).

The key point here is that east Germanness is formulated in relation to western perceptions of the east. Easterners respond to the widespread idea that the east is inferior to the west by bitterly rejecting the ways that they are characterised and complaining about their relative misfortune since unification. Hogwood's use of the adjectives 'bitter' and 'sulky' reveal how this form of east Germanness is perceived – a childlike and puerile identity which is said to have contributed to the view that easterners are sullen and never satisfied.

Hogwood goes on to suggest that the *Trotzidentität* is not the only form of east Germanness to have emerged as a response to apparent western superiority. She claims that some easterners challenge their supposed inferiority by asserting a sense of *Ossi-pride*, where they have 'adapted their Ossi tag to reflect those values perceived amongst themselves as both positive and characteristic of easterners' (p. 59). By highlighting their 'east German' attributes, easterners can challenge western hegemony in two ways. First, they can emphasise their positive characteristics in the face of negative perceptions of the east, for example they could attempt to counteract the idea that easterners are workshy by stressing their conscientiousness. Second, they can use their positive attributes to put the west into a negative light, so they may draw upon the idea that easterners share a strong sense of community to accentuate the notion that the westerners are selfish and individualistic. Importantly, both of these processes culminate in an identity that is determined by the way that the east is presented in hegemonic discourse. This means that, according to this academic perspective, the formation of east Germanness is entirely dependent on the way that the east is perceived by the more dominant west.

### Cultural artefacts

The final group to be considered in terms of the way in which eastern identity is expressed does not look specifically at the manifestation among the eastern population, but focuses instead on cultural representations of east Germanness. It should be noted there are numerous crossovers between these academics and the

above groups. The difference is that they focus their research on cultural artefacts such as media and literature rather than its societal manifestations. Scholars in this group include Cooke (2005), Silke Arnold-de Simine (2004) and Roger F. Cook (2007). According to Cook,

shared memories of the material culture in the GDR can help fill the breach opened up by the Wende, but narrative is needed to form a continuous, meaningful whole out of these diverse, isolated memories. The narratives of self on which individual identity is constructed are always interconnected with collective narratives that define a nation or culture (p. 209).

As is clear from the above statement, the formation of a collective eastern identity is based on shared experiences, which for these scholars are formulated primarily through cultural exhibits. Predominant works here include films such as Wolfgang Becker's *Good Bye Lenin!* (2003) and Leander Haußmann's *Sonnenallee* (1999). Attention is also given to numerous literary works that address east Germanness by authors such as Thomas Brussig and Jen Sparschuh. These cultural works focus on issues which are pertinent to easterners, thus bringing the matters which preoccupy this group into the public sphere. The academics who use cultural artefacts to explore east Germanness tend to focus on the same issues as other scholars in the field, such as *Ostalgie* (Cooke, 2003, 2005; Cook 2007) and the formation of a collective east German culture (Arnold de-Simine, 2004; Thomas, 2000). The popularity of such cultural representations is quite revealing in itself, since it demonstrates the relevance of east Germanness in unified Germany. Their existence contributes to the process of remembering the GDR, that is to say what is remembered about the socialist state, and is fundamental to the concept of shared memory, which feeds into identity processes.

In summary, scholars writing within the field of eastern identity can be divided into five groups, according to how they identify an eastern identity. The first group looks at developments in consumption and the second at *Ostalgie*, a phenomenon inherently associated with consumption. The focus within the *Ostalgie* group, however, tends to be the sentiments connected to it, as opposed to

the consumer behaviour itself. The third and forth groups explore social manifestations in contemporary Germany, the former concentrates on the existence of the *Mauer im Kopf* and the latter on the *zweite-Klasse-Mentalität*. The final group in this section can be defined as the cultural artefacts group, since they investigate the manifestation of an eastern identity primarily through the examination of literary and filmic representations.

### **Explaining the role played by and emergence of eastern identities**

The assumptions made by scholars regarding the role played by eastern identities contribute significantly to their research findings. These assumptions can be broadly divided into four perspectives, the first three of which incorporate more specific preconceptions about the role that eastern identities *should* play. They are: that eastern identities are problematic for German unity, that they are problematic for easterners themselves and that they are in fact a healthy sign of democracy. Scholars who adopt the fourth perspective are defined by the fact that they are relatively unconcerned with the role eastern identities play in terms of German unity. Instead, they focus on the construction and nature of the identities themselves. Researchers' assumptions regarding the role of eastern identities cross over significantly with where they perceive them to have come from. It is for this reason that academic standpoints regarding both the role played by and emergence of eastern identities are analysed in this section. Researchers can be divided into two groups according to how they perceive eastern identities to have emerged: those where the manifestation is viewed as an inevitable post-unification phenomenon, which is heavily influenced by the socialisation of easterners in a socialist state, and those where the formation of an eastern identity is believed to be primarily attributable to the nature of the unification process itself. Jonathan Grix (2002), a political scientist, provides two useful concepts in his work which can be applied here. The first is defined as the 'socialisation approach' (p. 3), according to which socialisation in two different socio-political systems is responsible for the existence of separate eastern and



western identities. The second is described as the 'situational approach' (ibid), which regards eastern identity as a direct result of the unification process.

Perspective one: East German identities are problematic for German unity

One of the two prevailing perspectives in existing literature on the role of east Germanness is the idea the east German identities jeopardise the full unity of Germany. The scholars who adopt this perspective can be divided into two further groups: approximately half of them take a 'socialisation approach', and the other half a 'situational approach'. Political scientists Gensicke (1995, 1998), Reißig (2000) and Dorbritz (1997) fall firmly into the 'socialisation' bracket, as they claim that the persistence of an eastern identity should have been anticipated as part of unification. According to the publications by these academics, the enormity of an event like unification was bound to have major implications on German society, and coming to terms with such significant change and acclimatising to one's new surroundings was inevitably going to be a lengthy process for the population of the new *Länder*. Gensicke (1998), for example, claims that 'leicht erklärbar ist, daß die neuen Bundesbürger diese Neigung zur Distanzierung als Veranlagung aus der Zeit des DDR-Sozialismus mitbringen' (p. 191) (the new German citizens' tendency of dissociation is easily explained as a predisposition from the time of GDR socialism). From this statement it is clear that, at least immediately following unification, the existence of a separate eastern identity, derived primarily from socialist experiences, was to be expected.

However, further reading of Gensicke's text reveals that the continued persistence of such a separation between the east and the west could, and indeed should, have been avoided, due to the threat it poses to full German unity:

Schon schwerer zu erklären ist, warum diese Distanz nun im vereinigten Deutschland bestehen bleibt und warum die neuen Bundesbürger nicht bereit sind, sich stärker mit den gesellschaftlichen Leitbildern des Westens anzufreunden (p. 191).

(It is more difficult to explain why this distance still exists in unified Germany, and why the new German citizens are not ready to associate themselves more closely with western societal models.)

This statement clearly infers that the GDR past should have disappeared once the initial turbulence surrounding the unification process had stabilised. Importantly, these researchers suggest that for unification to reach 'successful' completion, easterners will have to have adopted western norms and values to the same extent as those who were socialised in the west. The implicit connotations of this assertion are quite revealing in terms of the western premises on which unification was carried out and the perceived idea of 'full unity'. The use of the term 'western societal models' illustrates that the unified German social structure was based on the west, rather than a combination of the eastern and western systems. It also infers that a predetermined western model, and therefore a predetermined idea of 'full' or 'successful unity' exists. It does not take into account the continually evolving aspects of society, nor the western societal developments that were unavoidable during the unification process, despite the fact it was carried out on western terms. The introduction of a group as large as the population of the GDR into Germany was bound to instigate some level of change to the dynamics of the old *Länder*.

Also striking about the above quotation is the amount of responsibility Gensicke apportions to the eastern population for the separation between the east and west. By referring directly to the 'new German citizens', it appears that he is reproaching easterners themselves, rather than political or economic structures, for failing to bridge the gap. He infers that easterners are not prepared to even attempt to work within the western model. This assertion corresponds to the analysis of the *Mauer im Kopf* concept in the previous section, which metaphorically suggests that the construction of a divide in eastern and western mentalities was intentional.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> See pp. 32-34.

Looking more closely at academic work exploring how east Germanness may pose a problem for unified Germany reveals how such perceptions are formulated. Social scientists Thomas Goll and Thomas Leurer (2004) claim that:

Erinnerung aber hat in Deutschland nach wie vor zwei Stränge, einen westdeutschen und einen ostdeutschen. Über die Geschichte der Teilung Deutschlands und insbesondere über die Geschichte der DDR verfügen die Deutschen über kein einheitliches Geschichtsbild. [...] Das hat Auswirkungen auf die politische Kultur der Bundesrepublik, denn nicht alle Werte werden in West und Ost gleich betont (p. 7).

(Memory in Germany still has two strands, a west German one and an east German one. The Germans do not have a united historical picture of the division of Germany, or, in particular, of GDR history. [...] This has effects on the political culture of the Federal Republic because not all values are emphasised in the same way in the west and east.)

From this quotation it is clear that Goll and Leurer are concerned about the existence of multiple modes of remembering because they are deemed to threaten a coherent understanding of Germanness. Further reading of Goll and Leurer's work reveals, however, that in their concerns about separate east and west German strands of memory existing in unified Germany, it is east German modes of remembering that are deemed problematic. They go on to assert that

aus der Sicht der politischen Bildung können [...] nur die Alarmglocken läuten, wenn gleichzeitig Umfragen ergeben, dass [...] das Leben in der DDR von mehr als der Hälfte der Ostdeutschen – und das mit steigender Tendenz – verklärt wird und obendrein die Fremdheit zwischen den Deutschen nicht etwa abnimmt, sondern Negativ-Klischees wieder verstärkt das Verhältnis bestimmen (p. 9).

(from the view of political culture [...] alarm bells can only ring when surveys are simultaneously showing that [...] life in the GDR – and this is a growing trend – is being romanticised by over half of east Germans, and on top of that the alienation between the Germans is not decreasing, rather the relationship is increasingly defined through negative clichés.)

By explicitly linking an apparent romanticisation of the GDR past with supposedly increasing distance between easterners and westerners, Goll and Leurer are presenting east German remembering as the problematic strand. They

are implying that western memories constitute the 'correct' way of remembering. They claim that east German memories focus on a rose-tinted view of the GDR everyday and overlook the negative political aspects of the socialist state. Easterners therefore compare contemporary Germany to this purportedly romanticised view, which puts unified Germany in a negative light and prevents easterners from identifying with its political and social structures (Goll and Leurer, 2004; Leurer, 2004). The subtext of this problematisation suggests that easterners cannot identify with unified Germany if their identifications with the GDR past deviate from the dominant discourse on east Germany in contemporary Germany.

While some researchers, such as Gensicke, consider the eastern population to be largely responsible for the failure of Germany to reach the perception of 'full unity', others claim that the predetermined idea of successful German unity would have been more likely to have been fulfilled if the transformation process had been better managed and easterners had received better support during the transition. The second group of scholars who present east German identities as a problem for German unity therefore take a 'situational approach', as they emphasise the role of the unification process in the emergence of an eastern identity. This mode of thinking is held by researchers such as Thierse (2000), political scientist Rüdiger Thomas (2000) and Theobald (2000), again, a group primarily made up of German scholars, with only a few exceptions. These researchers also focus on the idea of the *Mauer im Kopf* in their work. However, they maintain that the divide between the east and west is linked directly to the unification process itself, rather than the differences in socialisation experiences. This means that, in their view, it could have been overcome if the introduction of the GDR into the Federal Republic had been approached differently, as illustrated by the following quotation from Thierse (2000):

Die Eigenheiten der ostdeutschen Bundesländer bestehen noch aus ökonomischen Nachteilen, einer problematischen Vergangenheit und mentalen Folgen der schnellen Transformation (p. 11).

(The characteristics of the east German states still exist due to economic disadvantage, a problematic past and mental consequences of the rapid transformation.)

It is clear from this comment that Thierse emphasises the impact of the unification process and the time thereafter in his research on the explanations for the emergence of an eastern identity. Although the difference here is subtle, there is an important distinction to be made between the various claims made about the role of the unification process in the formation of a contemporary eastern identity. All of the scholars who present eastern identities as a problem for German unity recognise the significance of the unification process, however, those taking a 'socialisation approach' are of the opinion that an eastern identity was to some extent inevitable, but that its contemporary form and continued existence has been heavily shaped by eastern post-unification behaviour. The researchers who adopt a 'situational approach' do not see eastern identity as inevitable, but as a product of the way in which unification was carried out.

Crucial to acknowledge here are the common implicit notions held by all of these scholars; they all assume a predetermined idea of 'successful unity', namely the westernisation of the eastern *Länder*, but suggest different reasons for the failure to reach this goal. Unlike Gensicke's claims, the above quotation illustrates a sense of sympathy for the eastern population. From Thierse's acknowledgement of the 'economic disadvantages' and 'mental consequences of the rapid transformation', it is evident that he does not consider the eastern population to be responsible for the unsuccessful completion of Germany unity. For him, the persistence of east Germanness has been caused by the failure of German social structures to sufficiently provide for easterners during the transition, and not the refusal of the eastern population to adapt to a western way of life, as suggested by Gensicke.

#### Perspective two: East German identities are problematic for easterners

The view that eastern identity has been caused by unification is without doubt also the most common among postcolonial scholars in this field. A distinction

that does appear to separate postcolonial academics from others, however, is that they focus primarily on eastern identities themselves, rather than the role eastern identities play in Germany. Betts (2000), Blum (2000), Bach (2002) and Flockton (1999), to name just a few, focus their work on the negative foundations of eastern identity. This is not to say that they do not acknowledge its implications for German unity, but that this does not constitute the forefront of their research. They claim that contemporary east German identity was born primarily out of feelings of resentment and inferiority. This process is commonly described by the concepts of the *zweite-Klasse-Mentalität* and the *Trotzidentität*, as illustrated in the first section.<sup>6</sup> According to these researchers, the *zweite-Klasse-Mentalität* constitutes an unhealthy basis for processes of identification, as illustrated here by Flockton (1999):

This individualisation [i.e. emergence of an eastern identity] is essentially crisis management. As such it lacks the liberating effect of enhanced opportunities and scope for personal development but betrays its defensive purposes: much of it harks back to the former GDR and its presumably superior ways; much of it conjures up a new collectivity of east Germans as second-class, disadvantaged citizens (pp. 4-5).

The main issue here is the sense of suffering central to eastern identity. East Germans do not feel equal to their western counterparts, but instead have constructed their post-unification identities on feelings of inferiority. They consider themselves to be disadvantaged and believe that in the context of unified Germany, they are perceived as unworthy compared to those who grew up in the old *Länder*. For these scholars, this self-conception is unhealthy and causes suffering among the eastern population. Flockton's reference to 'individualisation', or separation from the west, does illustrate that the overall implications of this mentality upon German unity do play a role in her work, but her explicit concerns are the negative nature of contemporary eastern identity and the impact of this on the eastern population. When comparing these scholars to the above groups, it is necessary to note that they do not appear to apportion

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<sup>6</sup> See pp. 34-36.

the responsibility of social exclusions to the easterners themselves. Instead they hold external factors accountable, such as the failure of the unification process to have incorporated easterners into united Germany as equal citizens. From this perspective, they are similar to the above researchers who take a 'situational approach'. The fundamental feature separating these groups is the reasons that they view contemporary eastern identities as problematic. According to the research analysed in this section, it is negated primarily by its definition through inferiority, the work explored in the above section, on the other hand, raise concerns about the threat it poses to 'full unity'.

It is also relevant to note that, within the group of researchers who represent east German identities as a problem for easterners themselves, there is a relatively small subgroup which take their claims one step further. They claim that, in theory, the existence of multiple identities in a society is actually a healthy sign of pluralism. However, in line with the analysis above, they argue that the negative connotations associated with east Germanness counteract the potential benefits of the co-existence of a diversity of identities in a society. For example, Patrick Stevenson (2000), who works in the field of sociolinguistics, explains that:

While this [eastern identity] may be seen as a positive manifestation of resilience and pluralism, it is also mis-shapen by the fact that it is reactive to unsubtle manipulations of history, false promises about the benefits of unification, and distorted east-west definitions – all based on western triumphalism, and thus on unhealthy asymmetries of perception (p. 11).

The potential benefits of multiple identities in a pluralist society are clearly acknowledged here. However, according to this perspective these advantages have not been realised in Germany, since the basis of east Germanness appears to be so negative. The significance attached to pluralism by this group highlights the foundations of their implicit notions. They do indeed hold a predetermined idea of successful German unity, but it is not characterised by the transfer of western ideologies onto the former GDR and the existence of pan-German sentiments. The inherent concepts of this research relate to the existence of

multiple and diverse identities which ultimately constitute a sign of a healthy, democratic society.

Perspective three: East German identities are a healthy sign of democracy

There is another much smaller group of academics in this field who view the existence of an eastern identity as a purely positive feature of unified Germany. Cooke (2005), who works in cultural studies, and political scientist McFalls (2002) deny that the nature of the manifestation is inherently damaging to easterners and that its existence constitutes a hindrance to German unity. They fall into the same category as Stevenson above, insofar as they implicitly base their work on the concept of pluralism. Cooke and McFalls do not however view east German identity as the product of inferiority, but as a healthy sign of democracy and that easterners have indeed accepted and work within the norms and values of unified Germany:

Far from being a threat to social stability, might not the continued existence of certain cultural legacies of the GDR, within a context where the vast majority of the population accept the structures of the unified state, point, in fact, to the existence of a healthy, democratic culture, a vibrant sphere of politics, [...] which can support a diverse range of views? (Cooke, 2005, p. 203)

A fundamental feature of this strand of research is the belief that unification has been completed in Germany. According to these scholars, the existence of the east-west gap does not need to be resolved; in fact, it is a healthy attribute of the Federal Republic, demonstrating successful pluralism and democratic thinking. As noted above, a significant number of German academics are of the belief that 'complete unity' should be demonstrated, at least in part, by the existence of a sense of national unity, whereby easterners have fully embraced the western market economy and democratic system. Scholars such as Cooke do not deny the importance of easterners acclimatising to western society. In fact, according to their assertions, this process has already been completed, demonstrated by the



claim that eastern identity now exists in the context of unified Germany, thus illustrating an acceptance of the structures within this system. The assertion that contemporary eastern identity exemplifies the acclimatisation of easterners to a market economy also demonstrates that researchers who hold this perspective adopt a primarily 'situational approach'. This is not to say they deny the significance of the past; in fact, the incorporation of a socialist past into a capitalist present is very significant here. However, that the expression of these experiences has been rearticulated in a western context implies that the influence of post-unification German society is of principal importance.

#### Perspective four: East German identities are revealing in themselves

The fourth perspective on the emergence of and role played by eastern identities is quite distinctive from the other three. The researchers in this group hold far fewer preconceptions about the implications of eastern identities for unified Germany or for easterners themselves. Instead, they are primarily concerned with investigating developments within east Germanness and its position as one of numerous identities in Germany. The majority of the scholars in this group take a 'direct' research approach, so engage with easterners in their work. There is a relatively small number, however, who take an 'indirect' approach, focusing instead on broader social concepts. Jonathan Grix's work (2002), which belongs to the latter group, illustrates that the principal objective here is to gain a deeper understanding of eastern identities. He claims that "'East Germanness" can be perceived as a distinctive phenomenon and a level of identification that exists alongside local, [...] regional and national identities' (p. 1). It should be noted that he does not appear to view their existence as problematic. His assertion that the manifestation exists 'alongside' other forms of identity infers that eastern identity does not pose a threat to national and regional identities, but that the coexistence of multiple identities is possible.

When exploring how these researchers explain the emergence of an eastern identity, it appears initially that they employ a 'socialisation approach', claiming

that the existence of an eastern identity following 1990 is the result of the socialisation of easterners and westerners in different social and political systems. Academics such as Kelly-Holmes (2000) and Grix (2002), for example, are of the belief that, due to the vast disparity in their socialisation experiences, it was inevitable that the unification of Germany would not automatically lead to the coalescence of the two groups: 'The life world, the context [...] in the west [...] did not correspond with the life-world and context of the east' (Kelly-Holmes, 2000, p. 94). The fundamental point here is that an eastern identity already existed in the GDR. These norms and values were an inherent part of the new German citizens that could not simply be left behind. Therefore, the initial manifestation of eastern identity only appeared so distinct because of its sudden transfer to a completely different social context.

It should not be assumed, however, that the emphasis of this group on pre-unification socialisation infers that they do not recognise the significance of post-unification experiences. The past is remembered through the context of the present, so, the longer the time since unification, the more relevant post-unification society becomes in the incorporation of early socialisation experiences into one's identity. Grix claims:

It is the curious mixture of pre-1990 values refracted through the 'prism' of German unity and the (continuing) transformation of East German society that has led to the development of two distinct political and cultural identities in East and West Germany more than a decade after official unification (p. 4).

According to this view, GDR values continue to be relevant in unified Germany, but are combined with values that easterners have adopted since unification. An important feature of this strand of thought is the continued incorporation of GDR socialisation, as well as post-unification experiences, into the everyday of unified Germany. It appears, then, that the researchers in this group are in fact the most likely to combine the 'socialisation' and 'situational' approach in their work.

The researchers in this group who take a 'direct' approach are made up largely of anthropologists, based predominantly in America, such as Berdahl (1999a, 1999b, 2000, 2001) and Ten Dyke (2000). They are concerned with gaining an insight into the rearticulation of individuals' identities in the transition from socialism to postsocialism and how this will lead to the construction of new social and cultural dynamics. Berdahl (2000) is keen to highlight the objectives of her research, claiming in her introduction to an edited volume of essays on postsocialist identity that the publication

focus[es] on the contradictions, paradoxes, and ambiguities of postsocialism. [It] explore[s] the construction and contestation of new cultural landscapes and probe[s] the emergence of new asymmetrical power relations (p. 1).

Fundamental to this anthropological research is the opportunity to gain insights into the features of understandings which alter in a postsocialist context, and those which remain despite, or perhaps to spite, the considerable changes experienced by individuals. The objective is to understand the processes undertaken by those experiencing the transition from socialism to postsocialism. This constitutes a distinct difference between researchers focusing primarily on the construction of east Germanness, and those discussed above, who are much less likely to focus on the intricacies, parallels and contesting features of east Germanness. Like Grix and Kelly-Holmes, therefore, the inherent concepts of these scholars are not centred around a predetermined idea of 'successful unity' based on the emergence of pan-Germanness, nor are they preoccupied with ascertaining whether or not contemporary Germany is pluralistic. Instead, the focus is identity processes and responses to social change.

It can also be said that these anthropological researchers combine the 'situational' and 'socialisation' approach. The impact of the present on the negotiation of eastern identities is indeed of crucial importance, however, the role played by the past in the formation of identities should not be underestimated here. Memory constitutes a fundamental building block in the construction of self-

understanding: 'ethnographically grounded scholars frequently emphasize important continuities between socialist and postsocialist societies' (Berdahl, 2000, p. 3). The significance of the idea of continuity should be noted here; east Germanness is shaped by memory, which is rearticulated according to current social conditions and interaction with others. Like others taking a 'situational approach', therefore, anthropologists place considerable emphasis on the nature of the unification process and the impact of this on easterners. Nevertheless, they also consider the manifestation to be inevitable – the transfer of socialist norms and values into a postsocialist context should have been anticipated.

An additional distinctive feature of anthropological researchers is their call for reflexivity. They are very aware of the impact that their own preconceptions will have on their work, and are keen to encourage scholars in this field not to impose their own values and expectations onto the group they are examining:

One of the principal concerns of an anthropology of postsocialism has been to challenge teleological assumption and evolutionary perspectives surrounding a particular trajectory of change (Berdahl, 2000, p. 11).

This mentality is a long-standing tradition in anthropology, but quite unique in the field of east German studies, where little anthropological work has been conducted. Scholars adopting other approaches are often less aware of their influence as researchers, and make less of an attempt to challenge the preconceived conceptual framework that has been constructed, be it consciously or subconsciously, since 1990 by those working in this field.

It seems that the primary distinction when it comes to different ways of explaining east Germanness relates to the implicit notions of the scholars in question. Many academics, particularly those from Germany, hold a predetermined idea of what 'successful German unification' entails, which appears to be based predominantly on the westernisation of eastern mentalities. Whom they hold accountable for the supposed failure of German unity depends on where they perceive eastern identities to have come from. Scholars who take a 'socialisation approach' tend to hold easterners responsible for their apparent

inability, or even refusal to accept the western system. Those adopting a 'situational approach', on the other hand, emphasise the traumatic unification experience to explain the perceived gap between the east and west. All of the scholars who focus on the impact of eastern identities for easterners themselves take a 'situational approach'. In this sense, this group is comparable to the 'situational' scholars who claim that eastern identities are problematic for German unity. They are, however, less concerned with the impact of eastern identities for unified Germany, but instead emphasise the implications of an identity based on inferiority for the eastern population. Researchers exploring the construction and nature of eastern identities, on the other hand, tend to hold far fewer expectations of the unification process, and even express a sense of caution about framing the study of postsocialist societies with western assumptions. Their objective appears to be to gain insight into the nature of eastern identity itself, that is to say, how identities develop when faced with major social change, and the results of this process in the construction of a new and continuously evolving society.

### **The research puzzle**

The analysis of the diversity of publications in the field of east German studies has highlighted that texts can be broadly divided into groups depending on how the researcher identifies an east German identity, the reasons they propose for its emergence and their assertions regarding its impact on contemporary German society. The methods used by different scholars to explore eastern identities also constitute a significant distinction. The majority of studies in this field adopt an 'indirect' approach, examining social and economic trends or cultural representations in order to highlight the broader features and role of east German identity in unified Germany. These researchers do not engage directly with easterners in their work. Those conducting a 'direct' approach, which entails direct engagement with easterners, constitute a far smaller group, and can be further categorised into quantitative and qualitative researchers. While

quantitative projects involve conducting large-scale studies to explore social tendencies within the wider population, qualitative studies focus on individuals, in order to ascertain how they renegotiate their identities, and how this ultimately feeds into the society in which they reside. The research methods employed correspond directly to the researcher's objectives, and ultimately the aspects of eastern identity they focus on and the conclusions they draw.

Many scholars claim that consumption is central to this manifestation. In part, this is because consumption is recognised as a social practice which existed in the GDR and also plays a key role in unified Germany, but has changed dramatically in the shift from socialism to capitalism. It is also considered important because, for a number of researchers, unification and the time thereafter was largely characterised by the practice. As a result of the intensification of limited consumer opportunities through western media representations in the GDR, easterners appeared initially to embrace the wealth of goods available following unification before returning their interests to eastern goods. Although the actual consumer patterns which emerged post-unification are difficult to ascertain, not least due to media representations, or misrepresentations, it is clear that the study of consumer practices raises pertinent questions. In addition to familiarising themselves with the vast range of brands in a market economy, and the connotations associated with them, easterners were expected to adopt a very different consumer mentality. Consumer practices were based on social contacts and cooperative behaviour in the GDR, which is converse to the individualistic nature of consumption in a market economy. The decision to focus on consumption in the study of east Germanness stems not only from pre-unification differences between the east and west, but also the characterisation of unification as based on consumer practices. If east Germanness has been popularly presented as an identity which is intrinsically linked to consumption, then exploring how easterners perceive the social practice in the context of unified Germany will provide valuable findings about their east Germanness.

Such a research focus is intrinsically linked to the study of *Ostalgie*, since apparent sentiments of nostalgia towards aspects of the GDR appear to be

displayed predominantly through consumption. The scholars considering this mode of expression are primarily concerned with the symbolic meanings behind the phenomenon, which often involves interrogating the derogatory and dismissive connotations apparently associated with contemporary eastern identities. The role of popular perceptions of east Germanness in shaping easterners' understandings should not be underestimated, as explained in the following chapter which outlines the theoretical framework for the thesis. Gaining insights into perceptions of *Ostalgie*, as well as shedding light on the ideas of the *zweite-Klasse-Mentalität* and *Trotzidentität*, will reveal how easterners negotiate popular perceptions in their identity processes. It will engage with claims made in some existing research that eastern identities can be understood as a response to western perceptions of the east.

A further concept which has proved central to existing research in the field is the idea of the east-west distinction. In its most extreme form, this is often referred to as the *Mauer im Kopf*, which can be understood as a problematic ongoing division between the east and west. The scholars who work specifically with this concept, however, are not the only ones who refer to an east-west distinction. In fact, theories relating to east Germanness are always framed by the idea that the old and new *Länder* act as polar opposites. This raises questions about whether easterners construct their own perceptions according to this framework, and if the role of the east-west distinction shifts in different forms of social interaction. Gaining more in-depth insights into this idea will not only reveal how individuals negotiate their east Germanness, but also how their identities feed into social interactions in the broader context of unified Germany.

From the analysis in this chapter it is clear that there are many parallels and crossovers between scholars in this field. As demonstrated, the implicit notions held by different academics are critical here, since they provide the foundation for research projects, and thus dictate the direction of the research and the assumptions that are made. For example, many German academics appear to hold a predetermined idea of 'full unity', based primarily on the westernisation of the eastern population and the existence of a sense of pan-Germanness. This

automatically leads to the assumption that the incorporation of GDR experiences into contemporary Germany is problematic, thus making the existence of a distinctive eastern identity negative. This strand of thinking differs greatly to that held by researchers taking a pluralist approach, who inherently favour the existence of multiple, hybrid identities in contemporary societies. Therefore, they do not, in theory, view the existence of a distinctive eastern identity as problematic, as their notion of 'full unity' does not involve such strong sentiments of pan-Germanness. The researchers who present east German identities as being problematic for easterners also appear to take a pluralist approach, whether implicitly or explicitly. While they do not always openly advocate pluralistic tendencies in the same way, their focus on the apparent suffering incurred by easterners and call to enable the population of the new *Länder* to develop a more positive identity, rather than the potential threat posed by the manifestation to 'full unity', implies that they endorse pluralism. The implicit notions of the researchers who focus purely on the complexities of east German identity processes are quite different again, since the premise here is the investigation of the nature of an eastern identity, rather than an analysis of its role in contemporary Germany. These scholars appear to explore the manifestation of an eastern identity relatively independently of predetermined ideas about how unified Germany apparently is or should be. Furthermore, the reflexive approach adopted by anthropologists enables the acknowledgement of their influence on their research, increasing awareness of and limiting its potential pitfalls. The findings of the other groups, on the other hand are more shaped by their political ideologies and preconceptions.

The recognition of the influence of implicit assumptions on the part of researchers has contributed to the construction of another key framework for this project. Conducting reflexive research and moving away from predetermined ideologies offers the opportunity to consider east Germanness in a new light, potentially revealing features which have been concealed by dominant discourse typifying east Germanness. The theoretical and methodological framework for this thesis therefore aims to enable reflexive research and challenge widespread



perceptions and assumptions. It moves away from predetermined ideas about 'full unity' and addresses the perception that east Germanness has been formed by negative popular perceptions of the east. It achieves this by focusing on easterners' understandings, exploring how they engage with popular perceptions when making sense of the self and others. In addition to taking this research perspective, the project will focus on a specific demographic group, namely 1970s generation easterners who live in Berlin.<sup>7</sup> Tightly focusing the project's aims in this way will enable the research to gain more specific and in-depth insights into how this group negotiates their east Germanness. The combination of anthropological methods with a theoretical framework based on identities, discourses and consumption will also help to fulfil these aims. The theoretical and methodological frameworks for the project, as well as the reasons for selecting 1970s generation easterners in Berlin as a case study, are explained in more detail in the following two chapters.

### Research questions

The research questions for this project have been formulated to specify the research aims outlined above. These aims emerged from reviewing existing academic literature in the field of east Germanness, and thus identifying the under-researched areas. They also address findings which appear to have been shaped heavily by the implicit assumptions of the researcher, and therefore require further exploration from a more reflexive standpoint. The research questions, therefore, pave the way for a fresh perspective on eastern identities and have the potential to bring new insights into the field of east Germanness. The four questions which form the basis for this project are:

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<sup>7</sup> See pp. 109-113 for the reasons that this group has been selected.

*Do participants make a distinction between the east and west, and if so, where do they locate themselves in this categorisation?*

The idea of the east-west distinction is key to the majority of existing research in the field. In most cases, studies are framed by the idea act as polar opposites, and that east Germanness can be interpreted as a response to western perceptions of the east. The concept of the *Mauer im Kopf* is also prevalent in the field, where a number of researchers problematise a perceived ongoing gap between the east and west which is said to jeopardise inner unity. This concept tends to be examined on the basis of dominant discourse or quantitative surveys. Research therefore looks at broad understandings of the characteristics which are said to differentiate easterners from westerners, which implicitly presents the east and west as antipodal. This may oversimplify the complex processes by which individuals interact with the west in different social contexts and thus overlook the intricate balance between sameness and difference in the negotiation of identities. It is these complexities which this project explores.

*How do the participants respond to and interact with popular representations of east Germanness?*

The study of east Germanness is often determined by the way it is considered to be perceived in the popular sphere of Germany. The majority of these representations, such as *Ostalgie* and perceptions that easterners are inexperienced when it comes to western consumer norms, are problematised in existing literature. Some scholars consider them to derogate east Germanness, and thus create difficulties for easterners themselves. Others take these representations as evidence that eastern identities are at odds with western norms, and therefore jeopardise the full unity of Germany. This research question aims to find out how easterners themselves respond to and engage with these popular perceptions. This will address the arguments made with regard to the perceptions in existing literature. It will also find out if and how the participants

use the perceptions in their own identity processes and in the way that they understand others through discursive practices.

*How have easterners' conceptions of east Germanness been shaped and what drives them?*

Existing literature also offers little consensus on the drives for contemporary east Germanness, with some scholars asserting that it is borne out of resentment and inferiority resulting from western control of the unification process and others positing it as easterners attempting to maintain a link with their past in the context of unified Germany. Moving away from generic conceptualisations and exploring the intricacies of eastern understandings will provide a more in-depth understanding of these questions. It will clarify what drives east Germanness and how easterners' perceptions of the GDR and of the west feed into their identity processes.

*How do participants identify with unified Germany, and how do their conceptions of east Germanness fit in with this?*

A significant proportion of current work in the field is shaped by the assumption that eastern identity cannot sit comfortably alongside a German identity. This feeds into the assertion that east Germanness jeopardises identifications with the unified German state, and ultimately the completion of unity. Questioning the assumption that east Germanness and Germanness cannot coexist by looking at how easterners identify with Germany and their GDR past will not only give insights into the relationship between the two identifications, but may also show that the assumption is problematic. It will reveal how easterners negotiate their eastern identities in the context of unified Germany and whether they perceive their east Germanness to be a part of or distinct from their Germanness.

## Chapter Two

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### **Theorising identities: An analytical framework**

The theoretical framework for this project is one of its most important aspects; it determines the key approaches for the study which, in turn, feed into its findings. The literature review revealed how the theoretical perspective adopted by the researcher significantly influences their findings. It found that a considerable amount of existing academic theories of east Germanness focus on the issue of German unity, and problematise east Germanness for apparently jeopardising the completion of this process. These researchers hold a relatively fixed idea of Germanness, suggesting that identifications with contemporary Germany correspond to, or should correspond to a uniform model based primarily on the idea of west Germanness. The problem with this approach is that it does not account for the differentiated and contextual nature of identity processes, and thus homogenises the idea of Germanness. This chapter sets out a framework which challenges these assumptions. Drawing on constructivist theories of identity, the framework paves the way for research into the complex ways that identity processes continually shift. It addresses the question of otherness and how different forms of social interaction influence individuals' identity processes and perceptions. This approach ensures that the thesis reveals the intricacies of eastern identity processes. It addresses the ways that easterners engage with and are shaped by popular perceptions when making sense of themselves and of other easterners and westerners with whom they have different types of relationships. It also demonstrates how easterners position themselves between the past and present, and thus how they draw on their pasts to locate themselves in unified Germany.

The first section engages with essentialist and constructivist debates. This explains in more detail why a constructivist approach corresponds to the research objectives of this thesis. The second section looks at the dynamics of identities, exploring different constructivist takes on identity processes. The

analysis here focuses on the interaction between individuals and overarching discourses, and the complex power relations which play out within these processes. It sets out a framework for exploring both the influence of popular discourses over individuals' understandings and the ways that individuals negotiate these discourses when constructing their own perceptions. The complexities within these social processes do, however, mean that understanding them is a challenging task.

These complexities are addressed in the following two sections of the chapter, which explain that they can be overcome by breaking down the different types of discourse and ways that individuals engage with them. The section on different forms of categorisation in identity processes suggests that the ways that individuals engage with discourse differ between relational (categories according to personal relationships) and formal (overarching categories such as nationality, age or gender) categorisation (Brubaker, 2000). The analysis here shows how, by differentiating types of social categorisation, the thesis will reveal how discourses function differently in different forms of social categorisation. For example, individuals engage differently with discourse when discussing themselves, their families and friends and those whom they have never met. The chapter then moves on to look at the complexities of multiple identities, highlighting that identity processes consist of a large number of identifications. The degree to which different identifications come through at different times depend on the social context in which the interaction is taking place. This is an important observation, as it contributes to ensuring that the interviews successfully target perceptions of east Germanness, but do not pre-empt the participants' responses.

The final part of this chapter examines the ways that identities are articulated and presented to others. It shows that exploring the themes of discursiveness and consumption provide insights into identity processes in western societies, and moreover that they are particularly relevant to understandings of east Germanness. Looking at how easterners discursively structure their perceptions reveals how they construct their east Germanness, and how it fits into their conceptions of Germanness. Consumption presents itself as an appropriate theme

for the interviews for three reasons. First, it is key to negotiating identities in consumer societies. Second, it is a practice which existed in the GDR and also exists in unified Germany, but which has changed dramatically since unification. This means that it provides a window into the ways that the participants locate themselves between the past and present. Third, consumption underpins a large number of the popular perceptions about the east.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, taking consumption as an overarching theme is likely to encourage participants to discuss east Germanness. It does not, however, directly confront them with popular ideas, which may pre-empt their responses. While the theme of consumption provides a useful window into perceptions of east Germanness, the body of theoretical literature about the practice reveals that it is a diverse and highly complex area which is influenced by many variables. It is therefore necessary to tighten the focus by specifying one type of consumption. The type of consumption that is the subject of this project is gift-giving. Gift-giving is a culturally specific practice with which the majority of people in western societies engage. Marcel Mauss first recognised gift-giving behaviour as a window into the norms and values of different societies in his seminal essay about the motivations for different types of gift exchange (1924). Since this time the social practice has proved itself to provide valuable insights into societal processes (see Carrier, 1991; Giesler, 2006; Schwartz, 1967 and Sherry, 1983, 1993, among others). As a form of consumption, gift-giving is also a practice which has altered greatly in the transition from socialism to capitalism, and thus specifically sheds light onto how east German cultural identities are located between the past and present. Perhaps most important, however, are the sets of values which are tied into gift-giving. The ways that individuals perceive the economic and emotional value of gifts provides insights into their social identities. What is more, the sets of values that are linked with different forms of gift-giving correspond to popular perceptions about the east and west. The theme of gift-giving, however, does not

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<sup>8</sup>The resonance of stereotypes about the east relating to consumption have been echoed by numerous scholars in the field, including Merkel (1998), Ten Dyke (2000), Berdahl (1999a, 1999b, 2000, 2001), Bach (2002), McFalls (2002), Blum (2000), Kelly-Holmes (2000), and Patico and Caldwell (2002). They are explained in full on pp. 26-28.

directly engage with the loaded stereotypes which are typically conjured up by the term 'east' in the public sphere. It is thus also useful in encouraging the participants to compare their own perceptions with those of other easterners and westerners with whom they have different social relationships, but does not risk pre-empting the participants' responses.

### **What are identities: the essentialist-constructivist debate**

The theoretical framework for this project draws primarily on existing academic theories about identity processes. Exploring the literature in this field reveals that there are two main perspectives which underpin claims about how identities are formed. These perspectives are broadly defined as essentialist and constructivist; the former emphasising fixed and rooted identities and the latter focusing on how identities are negotiated according to social surroundings. This section evaluates these two standpoints by contextualising academic work on east Germanness within these theoretical groups. It shows that a constructivist framework fulfils the aims of the research questions for this thesis by focusing on the ways that individuals position themselves in relation to others in their identity processes. Furthermore, this approach addresses the assumptions made in some existing literature that east Germanness jeopardises a uniform sense of Germanness by emphasising the continuously shifting nature of identity processes. Therefore, it has the potential to provide fresh insights into perceptions of east Germanness in the context of unified Germany.

In his work on identity, cultural theorist and sociologist Stuart Hall questions how identity processes can be understood, focusing on what identities are and why their formation depends on history and social context. His research addresses the ongoing processes of identity construction and how these processes shape and are shaped by the dominant perceptions which underpin social meanings. He problematises essentialist theories of identity, which conceptualise a core or innate identity, or, as Hall puts it, a concept of 'one true self' (p. 223, 1990). He explains this definition further, describing 'stable, unchanging and

continuous frames of reference and meaning, beneath the shifting divisions and vicissitudes of our actual history' (p. 223, 1990). For Hall, the problem is that insufficient attention is given to how present circumstances, which are contextual and shift continuously, influence our frames of reference. He rejects the idea that there is a stable point, formed on the basis of common history, through which we identify ourselves. Instead, he suggests that we locate ourselves within different discourses, which are multiple, and constructed in the context of the present, which is always in motion.

Hall goes on to critique essentialism, pointing out the problems associated with an assumed homogeneity stemming from a common cultural heritage. He claims that essentialist theories homogenise identity processes, that is to say do not account for individual differences among groups who share an apparently common history. For Hall, focusing on the idea of a common history, rather than the shifting perceptions which determine how we interpret this history, suggests that everyone with this history is the same. This is not to say that he denies the importance of history, but that he calls for the way that history is interpreted in present contexts to be taken into account:

Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. [...] Far from being grounded in a mere 'recovery' of the past, which is waiting to be found, and which, when found, will secure our sense of ourselves into eternity, identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past (1990, p. 225).

The aspects of essentialist theories problematised by Hall provide a useful framework for understanding the limitations of some of the existing literature which proposes that eastern identities jeopardise the inner unity of Germany.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Approximately half of the researchers taking this perspective claim that the east and west do not share a common perception of history, but that easterners tend to romanticise the GDR past and thus do not fully identify with the western system of unified Germany (for example, Gensicke, 1995, 1998; Goll and Leurer, 2004). Notably, it is the east which is problematised here – they consider western historical perceptions to be 'correct' in the context of unified Germany. The other scholars taking this perspective also problematise eastern identities as a sign that the 'full unity' of Germany has not been completed (for example, Thierse, 2000;



The theoretical perspectives underpinning this view suggest that there is a stable and innate idea of (west) Germanness, which is, or should be shared by all Germans. The problem with this perspective is that, in line with Hall's arguments, it does not account for the ways that the present context influences *individual* conceptions or for differentiation among both easterners and westerners. It overlooks the continuous shifts which take place in the east *and* west. Therefore, proposing that all Germans should share in a common history and identify with a uniform sense of Germanness for unity to be considered successful is problematic and highly questionable. By overlooking the inevitable differentiation within perceptions of unified Germany and proposing a uniform sense of Germanness as a prerequisite for successful unity, these scholars are misguidedly problematising east Germanness. In order to understand east German perceptions in the context of unified Germany, then, this project requires a theoretical framework which challenges essentialist ideas.

Hall resolves these issues by proposing a constructivist approach to identity theory, which deals with the complexities of circumstantial interpretation processes and heterogeneity. As the name suggests, this perspective focuses on the way that perceptions of the past are constructed within the context of the present. The approach does acknowledge the role of a common history, recognising 'similarities' (the terminology should be noted here: Hall uses 'similarities' rather than sameness) between individuals with similar heritage, but incorporates heterogeneity, stemming from diverse interpretations, into the theory. Hall explains that

there are also critical points of deep and significant *difference* which constitute 'what we really are'; or rather – since history has intervened – 'what we have become'. [...] We cannot speak for very long, or with any exactness, about

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Thomas (2000); Theobald (2000). This group, however, holds the unification process responsible for the emergence of a distinctive east Germanness, rather than easterners themselves. The arguments made by these scholars are explained fully in the section analysing the perspective that east German identities are problematic for German unity on pp. 39-43.

‘one experience, one identity’, without acknowledging [...] the ruptures and discontinuities (1990, 225).

The constructivist approach, then, differs from essentialist theories in its definition of what identities are. For essentialists, they are a core, stable sense of being based on a uniform common history, while for constructivists they are contextual and continuously shifting perspectives on the past. Hall summarises his constructivist approach, claiming identity is ‘not an essence, but a *positioning*’ (1990, p. 226). Our identities are entirely dependent on how we position ourselves within current discourses of the past. The merits of taking a constructivist approach in the study of east Germanness are demonstrated in the research which focuses on east German identity processes.<sup>10</sup> These scholars focus on the continuous construction and reconstruction of identities according to time and space, emphasising the importance of present context in personal understandings of the self and the past. They reject the essentialist assertion that there is a single identity with which all members of a specific group identify, pointing out that identity processes vary according to the individual and the context – although identities may bear similarities, they are not homogenous, but heterogeneous. The findings of these projects provide in-depth insights into the complex dynamics of eastern identity processes.<sup>11</sup>

Exploring the underpinnings of the constructivist perspective and the ways that it has been used in existing research, then, it is clear that this approach to identity processes fits the requirements of this project. First, it challenges the idea of a uniform sense of Germanness, and thus moves away from perceptions that east Germanness jeopardises German unity. Researching eastern identities within the context of unified Germany without this prerequisite provides a fresh

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<sup>10</sup> The research published by this group, which includes Grix (2002), Kelly-Holmes (2000), Ten Dyke (2000) and Berdahl (1999a, 1999b, 2000, 2001), is outlined in the section entitled ‘East German identities are revealing in themselves’ on pp. 47-51.

<sup>11</sup> Berdahl’s ethnographic study of the east German village Kella is a key example of constructivism in east German studies. She works from the premise that identities are not static, but constantly shifting, claiming that identities and identifications are constructed through experience, negotiation and expression (1999a, p. 7). By taking such a nuanced and intricate approach to explore east Germanness, she reveals how individuals’ perceptions have been shaped since unification.

perspective. Second, framing the research with the constructivist idea that identity processes continuously shift according to social context fulfils the research questions outlined at the end of the previous chapter.<sup>12</sup> It reveals how the participants contextually position themselves and their east Germanness in discussions about unified Germany.

### **The dynamics of identities**

Constructivist theories on identity processes highlight the complexities of identity questions. It is not only the basis of identity which is contested, but also the different factors which feed into the processes. As explained in this section, identities are a product (albeit a continuously changing one) of interaction between individuals, other people and discourses, which can be understood as socially recognised ways of thinking. In order to create a workable theoretical framework for this project, the ways that these factors are said to work together in the construction of identity processes must be understood. This interaction is explored here, revealing that different identity theorists consider each factor to hold varying degrees of influence over identity processes. The analysis of these theories feeds into the framework for this thesis in two ways. First, it highlights the need to explore easterners' perceptions, discourse and perceived perceptions of others to gain a full understanding of eastern identity processes. Second, it sets out how these factors are said to work together, which provides a basic structure for finding out how conceptions of east Germanness are constructed.

Before exploring how the dynamics of identity processes are explained in existing academic literature, it is useful to provide a definition of discourse, a key concept in constructivist understandings of identity processes. The term was first coined by Michel Foucault, who went on to provide some of the most eminent work in the field of discourse and identities. Returning to Hall's work is useful here, as his definition of Foucault's concept neatly summarises how discourse is often

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<sup>12</sup> See pp. 55-57.

understood, and more importantly, how the concept is approached in this thesis. He explains:

Discourse [...] constructs the topic. It defines and produces the objects of our knowledge. [...] Just as a discourse 'rules in' certain ways of talking about a topic, defining an acceptable and intelligible way to talk, write, or conduct oneself, so also, by definition, it 'rules out' and restricts other ways of talking, of conducting ourselves in relation to the topic or constructing knowledge about it. Discourse [...] never consists of one statement, one text, one action, or one source. The same discourse, characteristic of the way of thinking or the state of knowledge at any one time [...], will appear across a range of texts, and as forms of conduct, at a number of different institutional sites within society (2001, pp. 72-73).

Discourse, then, exists in the form of texts and conducts, which determine our knowledge about the world around us. As Hall points out, it must include more than one statement or text – a fundamental element of a discourse is that it adopts a given viewpoint that is then reproduced in various forms throughout the social sphere to create an illusion of 'truth'. This apparent 'truth' or 'reality' determines acceptable behaviours and perceptions in society, thereby also defining behaviours and perceptions which are deemed socially unacceptable.<sup>13</sup>

Therefore, discourse sets the context in which identity processes take place. The significance of this should not be underestimated – as explained in the above section, constructivists argue that social context is key in the negotiation of identity processes. It sets the scene for the ways that individuals perceive themselves and others. In turn, it also influences how individuals present themselves to others. Hall explains these dynamics as 'positions of enunciation' (1990, p. 222), arguing that the ways that individuals negotiate their identities at any given time is determined by the space in which the process is taking place, so,

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<sup>13</sup> It should be noted that the term 'discourse' in this thesis refers only to the Foucauldian definition above, i.e. discourse as a set of 'rules and practices that produce [...] meaningful statements and regulated discourse in different historical periods' (Hall, 2001, p. 72). The term is not used in its traditional sense, i.e. discourse as 'passages of connected writing or speech' (ibid.). To prevent confusion, the term 'narrative' is used to refer to the latter meaning, and is employed primarily in relation to the participants' responses in the interviews.

though we speak, so to say, “in our own name”, of ourselves and from our own experience, nevertheless who speaks, and the subject that is spoken of, are never identical, never exactly in the same place (1990, p. 222).

Since, according to Hall, identities are formulated in relation to contexts which are constantly in motion, identities, too, are always shifting and never the same. He explains what he labels as ‘context’, asserting that identities are ‘constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic, discourses, practices and positions’ (2000, p. 17). He elaborates on the relationship between identities and discourse, highlighting that identity processes take place as part of discourses, and not alongside them:

Precisely because identities are constructed within, not outside discourse, we need to understand them as produced in specific historical and institutional sites within specific discursive formations and practices (2000, p. 17).

Exploring popular discourses about the east and the ways that easterners work within them therefore reveals how perceptions of east Germanness are constructed. The literature review showed that the majority of existing research takes a ‘direct’ research approach, focusing on overarching discourses rather than how they are understood by easterners themselves. They primarily address discourses on *Ostalgie*, distinctive consumer perceptions and the idea that the east is inferior to the west.<sup>14</sup> These approaches undoubtedly provide insights into how east Germanness is conceptualised in a wider context and shed light on how perceptions of the east and west come together in the public sphere. However, as they do not engage directly with eastern perceptions, their claims about how the discourses feed into eastern identities or the ways that easterners negotiate the discourse risk being speculative. A common assertion, for example, is that east Germanness is constructed in response to the idea that the west is superior, and so is formed on the basis of inferiority. This is said to manifest itself in the *zweite-*

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<sup>14</sup> The section on identifying an eastern identity in the literature review explains that these are the main focuses of existing literature, and that they tend to lead to findings about how overarching perceptions feed into conceptions of the east (see p. 23).

*Klasse-Mentalität* and *Trotzidentität*, both of which are shaped by the ways that easterners believe that they are perceived by the west.<sup>15</sup> There is, however, little in-depth anthropological research to support these claims. Furthermore, the lack of studies focusing on the intricacies of identity processes means that, if these forms of east Germanness do exist, the ways in which they shift contextually are unknown. Therefore, it seems that to gain more in-depth insights into east Germanness research needs to shift its focus more towards easterners' conceptions. This is not to say that discourse should be overlooked – as outlined above, this is fundamental in shaping identity processes. There does, however, need to be more of a balance between discourse and discursive identity construction to reveal how the two interact.

### **Power relations**

The power relations between overarching discourse and individuals' identity processes have been widely debated in theoretical work on the construction of identity. As Sierk Ybema et al. assert, 'the issue of whether actors constitute themselves through discourse or are choreographed by discourse remains, of course, an "essentially contested" matter of interpretations' (2009, p. 308). The tensions lie in whether individuals draw on discourse in a relatively active manner to shape their identities, or whether they are shaped more passively by discourse, and therefore have less agency in the process. Assessing the various theoretical perspectives on this question does, however, shed light on the dynamics of how individuals interact with, shape and are shaped by discourse. Acknowledging these contributes to the development of a theoretical framework for this study into east German identity processes, which incorporates the potential as well as the limitations of research in this field. Accounting for these factors, this section defines the theoretical aims of this thesis and the measures that will be taken to overcome some of the complexities of identity research.

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<sup>15</sup> See pp. 34-36 for a full explanation of these concepts.

In her review of identity debates, Karen Cerulo separates existing constructivist theories into two schools: constructionist and postmodernist. She suggests that the constructionist perspective focuses primarily on the process through which identities are constructed, which is based on anti-essentialism (1997, p. 387). Constructionists are keen to challenge the idea that identities have a stable core and highlight their changeable and fluid nature, caused by individuals interacting with a wide range of discourse. In their groundbreaking work on social constructionism, eminent theorists Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann understand 'human reality as a socially constructed reality' (1967, pp. 211). They argue that sociology should move away from 'purely structural analyses of social phenomena' and towards 'a systematic accounting of the dialectical relation between structural realities and the human enterprise of constructing reality' (p. 208). Importantly, these theorists do not deny that external forces contribute to how individuals define themselves; however, they attribute some degree of agency to individuals. By highlighting the individual's role in constructing realities, and within this their identities, constructionists bring individual action to the fore of identity studies. This perspective is explained more clearly through exemplification. Jonah Goldstein asserts that

the self is a social and historical construct, evolving in response to an ongoing dialogical relationship with others, a dynamic relationship that alters human beings as they internalize and reflect upon the way others view them (1994, p. 381).

First, it can be observed that Goldstein's focus on identity as a construct directly contradicts essentialist theories, demonstrated by his claim that the self 'evolves' and that this evolution is 'ongoing' and dependent on a 'dialogical relationship with others'. Such characteristics challenge the essentialist notion that human beings hold a stable and unchanging sense of self. Second, by positioning human beings as subjects in his sentence formation, who, he asserts, 'internalize' and 'reflect', he is suggesting that they are, to at least some degree, actors in this process, possessing some control over the formation of their identities.

The constructionist approach differs from that of the postmodernist school, which calls for more attention to be paid to the discourse which constrains and controls identity processes. In her interpretive work on immigrant discourse, Anna de Fina explains that postmodernist scholars tend to focus on the

ways in which identities change and evolve according to situations, interlocutors and contexts, ways in which identities are created, imposed, enjoined, or repressed through social institutions and interactions (2003, p. 16).

The postmodernist approach to identity processes tends to emphasise the power of discourse over identity processes, rather than the role of the individual in negotiating discourses. According to this school of thought, human beings continue to identify themselves in terms of essentialist concepts, as Ybema agrees:

The enactment of identity talk in autobiographical accounts, everyday conversations or public performances frequently presumes [...] an inner, authentic core, a deep essence, or a set of stable characteristics that are assumed to represent 'the' self of a person or category (2009, p. 305).

It is this tendency that postmodernists problematise, questioning why ideas of a stable and core identity prevail in individual conceptions of identity. They suggest the answer lies in power relations, and that constructionists underplay the power of discourse in their assumptions about agency. Cerulo explains that

many [postmodernists] contend that the constructionist approach implies identity categories built through interactive effort. Such a stance underemphasizes the role of power in the identification process, mistakenly suggesting 'multidirectional flow of influence and agency' (1997, p. 391, citing Calhoun, 1995, p. 199).

From the postmodernist perspective, underplaying the role of power in research on identity processes leads constructionists to draw the slightly misguided conclusion that identities are formulated primarily through interaction between individuals and discourse. They argue that individuals are more bound by



discourse than constructionists suggest, which determines individuals' identity processes. This is the reason that essentialist discourse dominates individual conceptions of identity; they are constrained by dominant discourse. Zygmunt Bauman raises such concerns in his work, claiming that,

at one pole of the emergent global hierarchy are those who can compose and decompose their identities more or less at will, drawing from the uncommonly large, planet-wide pool of offers. At the other pole are crowded those whose access to identity choice has been barred, people who are given no say in deciding their preferences and who in the end are burdened with identities enforced and imposed *by others*; identities which they themselves resent but are not allowed to shed and cannot manage to get rid of. Stereotyping, humiliating, dehumanizing, stigmatizing identities [author's italics] (2004, p. 38).

Bauman's explanation suggests that some of the constructionist assertions are oversimplified. It is fair to reason that individuals articulate their identities within the range of discourse available to them, but this theory neglects to account for the amount of agency that different social actors have. As Bauman clarifies, the more powerful social actors hold a large degree of agency, and therefore choose more freely which discourses they engage with. Others, however, have far less control, and are confined to limited discourses with which they can identify themselves.

The above analysis paves the way for the theoretical questions which will be explored in this project. First, how do the participants negotiate or work with the discourse which, according to existing research, dominates in popular perceptions of the east? To address this question, the interviews will first ascertain whether the discourses relating to *Ostalgie*, consumption and inferiority come into play in the participants' narratives, and second, how they respond to them. The second question is, do the participants' narratives suggest that they feel constrained by the discourse, that is, does the discourse appear to misconstrue or overshadow alternative perceptions of east Germanness? Ascertaining whether the participants hold alternative conceptions and, if they do, how these stand in relation to the discourse, will shed light on this question.

The third question is, do the dynamics between individuals and popular discourse shift according to whom the participants are discussing, and if so, how? Responding to this question requires analysing how the discourse is drawn upon in discussions about the self, about easterners and westerners with whom the participants have personal contact and in their generic understandings of the east and west.

As Bauman points out above, different individuals have access to different discourse and varying levels of control over the production of discourse, which determines how much agency they have over the construction and expression of their identities. The variables at play in individual identity processes make research in this area extremely complex; however, there are measures which can be taken to formulate an empirical framework which will reap fruitful results. First, since the processes are so differentiated, it stands to reason to investigate them on a case by case basis, therefore enabling the researcher to account for all of the variables within a specific case. This is the approach taken in this study, which consists of in-depth interviews with 1970s generation easterners living in Berlin. These are analysed vertically, so taking each interview as an individual case study, and horizontally, where the interviews will be examined comparatively. Second, it is necessary to break down the different types of discourse which feed into eastern identities and explore how the participants engage with them. The interviews investigate how the participants respond to these discourses and the extent to which they identify with them, which sheds light on how they correspond to individuals' understandings of east Germanness and how they are used by the participants in the negotiation of their identities.

### **The different forms of categorisation in identity processes**

The analysis of how easterners interact with dominant discourse is facilitated by understanding how discourse is communicated. These mechanisms range from meta-narratives presented in the media to personal relationships with other individuals. Sociologist Rogers Brubaker contributes significantly to this

understanding, as he focuses on how the complexities of identity may be overcome in academic research. He demonstrates not only that there are many factors at play in identity processes, but also that they are influenced by external forces. The construction of identities is shaped significantly by interaction with others, that is the ways that individuals perceive others and believe that they are perceived by others. These processes are framed by popular discourse. In order to make identity theories more workable for empirical studies, Brubaker identifies three themes which the aggregate concept of identity is often used to explain. These are identification and categorisation, self-understanding and social location and forms of belonging, which is further divided into the categories of connectedness, commonality and groupness (pp. 14-21, 2000). The theme of identification and categorisation is the most useful here for understanding how identities are constructed according to interaction with others in a research context.

Processes of identification and categorisation account for the ways in which we identify ourselves according to social categories, and also categorisation and identification by others. Brubaker differentiates between two forms of social categories. The first is labelled relational, referring to identification according to a position in a relationship. In terms of this study, this group comprises of other family members and friends or colleagues, either east or west German, with whom the participant has a personal relationship. The second is described as categorical, signifying identification according to a formal or official category, such as gender, ethnicity, nationality, or, more relevant to this project, east Germanness. The distinctiveness of these categories should be acknowledged as each plays a different social role. Categorical identification is an important institutional tool, providing classifications to define and differentiate a population. Relational identification constitutes a more personalised mode of individual definition.

The dialogical relationship between identification of the self and identification by others (which refers to popular discourse and formalised bodies, such as

governments, and informal social groups and individuals) is fundamental to the process of identification and categorisation. Brubaker asserts that:

In the ordinary ebb and flow of social life, people identify and categorize others, just as they identify and categorize themselves. But there is another key type of external identification that has no counterpart in the domain of self-identification: the formalized, codified, objectified systems of categorization developed by powerful, authoritative institutions (2000, p. 15).

Informal identification is determined through the everyday interaction of social groups, in which an individual identifies his or herself or is identified by their position within that social group. This informal process is framed by formalised categories, such as race or gender, or most relevant to this research, the categories of east and west German, within which the individual has less room for manoeuvre. Therefore, according to Brubaker, degrees of agency in the formation of overarching categories are very limited. Once categories have become dominant in popular discourse, the individual has little impact over their development. However, individuals gain more autonomy through social interaction, where they are able to manipulate overarching constructs to better correspond to the way they understand themselves.

Ybema notes similar dynamics in her work, claiming that ‘meta-narratives are a powerful and permanent ingredient of everyday sensemaking’, going on to recognise that ‘within the bounds of the available discursive regimes social actors may carve out situated identities or subject positions for themselves and others’ (2009, p. 311). The meta-narratives, or formalised categories as they are labelled by Brubaker, set up an overarching discourse, *within* which, as Hall notes above, individuals articulate identities. Individuals have little control over this discourse, but do have some agency over their identifications within these boundaries. Through day-to-day activities and discursive relations with others, individuals mould a more autonomous sense of self.

In line with Brubaker’s theory of identification and categorisation, then, this project will explore the relational and categorical processes which feed into

easterners' identity processes. This approach fits into the aim of striking a balance between constructionist and postmodern schools of thought, as outlined above. Exploring the formalised categories which are said to feed into east Germanness in the interviews shows how eastern identity processes are shaped by overarching discourse. These include the perceptions that the east lags behind the west in terms of economic prosperity and the acceptance of capitalist norms and values, as well as the idea of *Ostalgie*. In addition, they will ascertain the role that the notion of the east-west distinction plays in their understandings, paying particular attention to the idea that the east is inferior to the west. Looking at the ways that the participants negotiate their east Germanness through one-to-one interaction reveals how they construct their identities in different social contexts. This aspect of the study provides insights into the ways that they discuss encounters with easterners and westerners with whom they have personal contact. It will differentiate between the public and the private sphere, for example, distinguishing between work colleagues and family or friends. It should be noted that, because the material for the research will be collected specifically in an interview context, the degree to which the participants' perceptions shift in different social contexts cannot be revealed in its entirety. However, the interviews are designed to focus on relational interaction, which shows the different role that overarching discourse plays when the participants discuss different 'others'. The approach does, therefore, illustrate how the participants' perceptions shift in different forms of social interaction.

### **Multiple identities**

When constructing a workable analytical framework for research into identity processes, it is crucial to take account of their fluidity and multiplicity. Given that identities are shaped contextually, and that contexts continuously evolve, it stands to reason that every individual can be associated with numerous identities, which are also always in motion. Ayse Calgar agrees that people 'feel at ease with subjectivities that encompass plural and fluid cultural identities'

(1997, p. 169). Incorporating such fluidity and multiplicity into a research framework requires analysing how different identities exist alongside one another, and what causes different understandings to come through at given times and in given contexts. This facilitates the development of a methodology which brings a specific type of identity to the forefront, in this case, east German identity.

Bauman proposes a useful analogy for understanding how plural identities co-exist, claiming:

You need to compose identity (identities?) in the way you compose a design out of jigsawed pieces, but you can compare a biography only with a *defective* jigsaw puzzle, in which quite a few pieces [...] are missing [author's italics] (2004, pp. 47-48).

Conceptualising individuals' identities as a 'defective jigsaw puzzle' demonstrates how the different identities fit together, but also highlights that identities are never complete, always in process. This fluidity applies not only to the gaps in the jigsaw, but also to the pieces which are already there; these are always under construction and continuously shaped by the individuals' experiences of their social surroundings.

It is also useful to return to Brubaker's work here, as his second theme of self-understanding and social location focuses on the issue of multiple identifications, and how different identifications are highlighted at different times and in different places. Compared to the theme of categorisation and identification noted above, self-understanding is a more tacit and cognitive feature of personhood. While identification involves some degree of negotiation of social categories, self-understanding is described as an assumed sense of being which implicitly determines the way individuals behave in different social situations. Brubaker explains this facet as 'one's sense of who one is, of one's social location, and of how (given the first two) one is prepared to act' (2000, p. 17). From this quotation it is clear that self-understanding manifests itself in the manner that individuals present themselves. Brubaker goes on to substantiate this point,

defining the understanding of the self as a *sens pratique*. Individuals unconsciously adopt certain behaviours in everyday practices on the basis of who and where they are. In order to understand the construction of this form of self-perception, the components which make up the 'sense of who one is' and the significance of social location should be explored.

Self-understanding is entirely subjective, that is to say it does not encompass perceptions of individuals by others. This does not mean that processes of categorisation, as explained in the above section, do not contribute to the facets of self-understanding. However, the ways in which these facets come together is subjective for each individual. Brubaker clarifies this by describing self-understanding as a 'grid of intersecting categories' (2000, p. 17). The sense of who one is comprises of categories based on social constructions, which merge to create an individual sense of self. In short, the process of forming self-understanding can be, and often is, influenced by social categories and public discourse. However, self-understanding itself exists as a tacit and subjective form of self-conception, which is largely intuitive and determines unconscious behaviour.

Self-understanding must be investigated alongside social location because the form it takes is dependent on where that person is and whom they are with. For Brubaker, aspects of self-understanding can be fixed across time, but the conception also varies according to social space. As noted in the above quotation, actions are not only governed by 'one's sense of who one is', but also 'one's social location'. This point raises a fundamental difference between Brubaker and Bauman; Brubaker suggests that identities are to some extent static and fixed, while Bauman maintains that they are continuously in motion. This relates back to the essentialist-constructivist debate analysed at the beginning of the chapter, which seeks to determine whether individuals hold a core and stable identity, or if identities are continuously shaped and reshaped by surroundings. Like Bauman, Brubaker recognises that social location influences identities, but for him, self-understanding itself is not altered, rather the way that it is presented. Such an assertion suggests a discrepancy between 'one's sense of who one is' and

‘one’s social location’ – does social location really only influence the way we present ourselves, and not how we perceive ourselves? It seems that, given the significance Brubaker attributes to social categories in his first theme, sociality does play a formative role in self-understanding. Since sociality, and therefore individual experiences of it, are continuously in motion, it stands to reason that self-understandings are also fluid and always under construction.

Although Brubaker’s assertions about the static nature of self-understanding raises some issues, his explanation about how identifications co-exist and present themselves more dominantly in certain social situations provides a useful basis for an analytical framework investigating eastern identity. The self-understandings of 1970s generation easterners living in Berlin are constructed from a variety of categories based on social positions, for example, gender, class, nationality, religion, occupation and family ties. These factors merge to form a subjective conception of the self. In the case of the target group for the project, east Germanness is likely to be one of these factors. However, the way that the participants make sense of this is dependent on personal experiences during the GDR era and since unification, that is to say its temporal and contextual development. Furthermore, this personalised notion of east Germanness is just one part of the ‘grid’ of self-conception; it intersects with other categories, such as those mentioned above, to form the subjective grid of self-understanding. The potency of east Germanness within an individual’s self-understanding varies in different social spaces – individuals unconsciously decide how to present themselves on the basis of where they are. East Germanness should not therefore be considered as a distinct identity, but as a part of a self-understanding which constantly interacts with other self-conceptions and social surroundings. This means that, in order to gain an insight into how the participants conceptualise their east Germanness, the methodology must be designed to target the different understandings of eastern identity (as opposed to nationhood, gender, class, etc.). This involves striking a balance between neutrality (which is important as it ensures the participants’ responses



are not pre-empted) and directedness (which is required so that understandings of eastern identity emerge from the interviews).<sup>16</sup>

### **Stories, narratives and anecdotes: Negotiating identities discursively**

Having understood how identities are formed through ongoing interaction between individuals and discourse, resulting in a multitude of fluid and continuously evolving identifications, it is now possible to turn to the social practices which individuals use to negotiate and present their identities. Acknowledging these practices reveals how to observe identity processes, that is the windows into how individuals understand themselves. Giddens engages with these issues in his work, asking:

What to do? How to act? Who to be? These are focal questions for everyone living in circumstances of late modernity – and ones which, on some level or another, all of us answer, either discursively or through day-to-day social behaviour (2000, p. 248).

Here, Giddens suggests two windows into identity processes: discursiveness and everyday activities. The analytical framework for this project has been constructed taking both of these dimensions into account. This section focuses on the relevance of discursiveness. It explains how the theoretical framework has been designed to explore the ways that easterners discursively construct their perceptions of east Germanness. Language and discursiveness are fundamental tools to the processes of positioning the self in sociality and defining the self against an other. Ybema also observes this point, asserting that

different discursive forms – such as autobiography, narrative, storytelling and everyday interactions – [...] illustrate how individual agents experience, shape, reconstruct and are subject to the situational and structured ‘realities’ they inhabit (2009, p. 300).

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<sup>16</sup> The measures taken to ensure that this objective was met during data collection are explained on pp. 113-119 in the methodological chapter.

Analysing narratives, then, reveals where individuals locate themselves within wider discourse, as well as how they understand, rationalise and negotiate their identities. As noted above, individuals articulate a sense of self within the bounds of overarching discourse through day-to-day interaction with others. Therefore, research into eastern identity processes must investigate how individuals discursively locate themselves in relation to others. Ybema agrees, claiming that

identities emerge through the enactment of similarities and differences. Enactment involves the discursive separation of 'self' from the 'other' and it seems that an intrinsic part of the process by which we come to understand who we are is intimately connected to notions of who we are not and, by implication, who others are (and are not) (2009, p. 306).

Proposing that identities 'emerge through' similarities and differences demonstrates the significance of others in identity processes. For Ybema, identities are negotiated through this process, they cannot be created without comparison to others. This process is perhaps best clarified by returning to the first section of this chapter and Hall's explanation of self-definition as 'positioning'. The existence of others is implicit to the meaning of the verb 'position'; if there are no others, there is nothing with or against which individuals can position themselves. It is important, however, not to define relations to others as simply differences and similarities, as individuals differentiate and compare themselves to others at different degrees, which indicate different forms of identification with others. Brubaker concurs that researchers need to 'distinguish instances of strongly binding, vehemently felt groupness from more loosely structured, weakly constraining forms of affinity and affiliation' (2000, p. 21). Therefore, a productive theoretical framework must explore the extent to which individuals identify with and differentiate themselves from others.

The primary research for this project, therefore, consists of in-depth interviews focusing on easterners' perceptions of east Germanness. The participants' narratives are analysed to reveal how they discursively construct perceptions of east Germanness. The analysis focuses on perceptions of the self, and the way

that these are shaped by overarching discourse and one-to-one interaction with other easterners and westerners with whom the participants have personal contact. As well as shedding light on the participants' self-perceptions, this approach provides insights into the ways that they believe they are perceived by others, and how this feeds into their identity processes. The participants also discuss the ways in which they perceive easterners and westerners whom they have never met, which demonstrates how they conceptualise more generic understandings of the groups. Taken together, the analysis provides a overall picture of how the participants discursively construct their perceptions of east Germanness.

### **I am what I shop: Negotiating identities through consumption**

In addition to exploring how the participants construct their identities discursively, this project draws on perceptions of consumption to reveal how they negotiate east Germanness. It should be noted from the outset that the thesis does not aim to find out if easterners can be characterised by distinctive consumer attitudes or behaviours. The findings of this research do not, therefore, reveal whether easterners represent a distinctive consumer group in unified Germany. What it does illustrate, however, is whether the participants *view* themselves as distinctive consumers in contemporary Germany because of their GDR pasts. This in turn sheds light on the participants' identity processes, as their perceptions of consumption provide a window into the ways that they socially position themselves. This section (see pp. 26-29) is the second to focus on consumption in the thesis – the first, which was in the literature review focused specifically on claims made about consumption in relation to east Germanness. The analysis here looks at the broader use of consumption theory in the study of identity processes. It explains the rationale for choosing consumption as a way of understanding east Germanness and outlines how theories of consumption and identity make a useful theoretical framework for the project. The first part emphasises the significance of consumption in identity processes in consumer

societies. It also demonstrates why it is particularly useful for gaining insights into identity processes among individuals who have experienced the transition from a socialist to a capitalist society. The section then goes on to look more specifically at how consumption will be used in this study. It shows how exploring perceptions of consumption reveals the ways that individuals identify with and distance themselves from different social groups. The final part of this section focuses on the complexities of studies into consumption, highlighting that it is a broad and diverse social practice. For it to be incorporated into a workable theoretical and analytical framework, then, its focus must be tightened significantly. It is for this reason that the project concentrates on perceptions of gift-giving. This field is much more manageable when it comes to ensuring consistency during data collection. Furthermore, the social norms and values which are tied into gift-giving are highly relevant to the study of post-socialist identities.

### Consumption, identities and east Germanness

The social practice of consumption was selected to frame the design of the theoretical and methodological framework for two reasons. First, it is widely recognised as a useful window into identity processes in consumer societies.<sup>17</sup> Calgar points out the usefulness of consumption in understanding identity processes:

What makes consumption a crucial topic is its constitutive role in the formation of identities and social relations. [...] It is a social practice that serves as an important site for identification (1997, pp. 181-182).

The significance of consumption practices to identity studies is echoed among identity theorists because consumer preferences and attitudes regarding different forms of consumption are constructed according to self-conceptions and identifications with social categories. In a consumer society, consumption

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<sup>17</sup> See Barker, 2000; Bourdieu, 1986; Certeau, 1984; Douglas, 2003; Halter, 2000; Fine et al., 1993; Miller, 1998, 1995; Paterson among others.

constitutes a key tool not only for articulating identities, but also for negotiating them. As Daniel Miller neatly points out in the preface of his work on identity and shopping, 'shopping does not merely reproduce identities that are forged elsewhere but provides an active and independent component of identity-construction' (1998, p. ix). Mary Douglas, a well-known scholar in the field of consumption and identity, also notes the relationship between consumer choices and social identity in her work: 'The basic choice is not between kinds of goods, but between kinds of society, and, for the interim, between the kinds of position in society that are available to us' (2003, p. 144). Attitudes to consumption and the type of consumer that we present ourselves as provide a window not only into the ways we identify ourselves, but how we make sense of our social surroundings.

More specifically to this project, consumption is frequently considered to be one of the social practices that transformed the most dramatically in the shift from a socialist to a capitalist society. Patico points out that

in contrast to conventional wisdom from the perspectives of established capitalist market societies [...], the immediate and irreducibly social, interpersonal contexts of consumption are nearly impossible to ignore in socialist East Europe [...]. Today, in the early twenty first century, postsocialist citizens have begun the task of reorganizing these social worlds (2002, p. 288).

Consumption provides a potentially productive window into east Germanness because it was experienced by easterners both before and after the fall of the Wall, but in very different ways. As Patico notes, the era of post-socialism set the populations of socialist states the task of 'reorganizing' the 'social worlds' of consumption. Interviewing participants about a social practice which has remained, but changed significantly since the unification process, encourages them to locate themselves between the past and present, revealing where they locate themselves in the consumer society of unified Germany. Additionally, since consumer practices are strongly linked to identity processes, this approach

illustrates how the participants identify with east Germanness more generally in the context of contemporary Germany.

Consumption also presents itself as a useful tool in shedding light on east Germanness because it underpins many of the popular perceptions of the east in unified Germany. As explained in the literature review, the unification process is frequently characterised by the perceived ways that easterners responded to the shift into a capitalist society. It is said that easterners initially embraced western consumption, but, by the early 1990s, had turned their interests back to eastern products after being disillusioned and even stung by some of their experiences of capitalism. Such a portrayal of eastern consumer attitudes is considered to have fed into perceptions that easterners are unsophisticated shoppers who are inexperienced in the ways of a consumer society.<sup>18</sup> What is more, consumption is central to popular conceptions of *Ostalgie*, which is commonly used to refer to the resurgence of rather kitsch GDR products and memorabilia. Many scholars researching *Ostalgie* claim that, because of this apparent frivolity and triviality, processes of remembering the everyday of the GDR are frequently seen as wistful and unrealistic.<sup>19</sup> As a result of this focus in overarching discourse, it is likely that researching perceptions of consumption will shed light on understandings of east Germanness. It should be pointed out, however, that consumption plays only an implicit role in popular perceptions of the east. Therefore, in comparison to other popular labels or ideas, they are relatively unloaded. This is particularly important for the interview process. It means that, while taking consumption as a theme is likely to encourage the participants to talk about east Germanness, they will not be confronted with explicit popular ideas about the east which would risk pre-empting their responses. Therefore, interviewing easterners about consumption and the consumer-based stereotypes which characterise them as easterners in popular discourse reveals how they construct their identities in

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<sup>18</sup> The relevance of consumption in existing research on east Germanness is emphasised by numerous scholars in the field, including Merkel (1998), Ten Dyke (2000), Berdahl (1999a, 1999b, 2000, 2001), Bach (2002), McFalls (2002), Blum (2000), Kelly-Holmes (2000), and Patico and Caldwell (2002). See pp. 26-29 for a full explanation of the links made between consumption and east Germanness.

<sup>19</sup> The concept of *Ostalgie* is outlined in full on pp. 29-32.

relation to popular discourse, but also enables alternative conceptions to come through.

The question is, however, how exactly individuals' narratives about consumption reveal the ways in which individuals socially position themselves. The following sections demonstrate how consumption is used as a tool to construct a sense of belonging as well as markers of distinction. Understanding this process is crucial for the analytical framework of this project. It underpins the interpretation of the participants' perceptions of consumption, ensuring that the project reveals the social groups with which they identify and from which they distance themselves. It should be noted that constructing both a sense of belonging and markers of distinction are reliant on social interaction with others. For identification or distancing processes to take place, there must be other individuals or groups according to whom the participants locate themselves. Therefore, ascertaining the links between perceptions of consumption and ideas of belonging or distinction paves the way for understanding how the participants negotiate their identities in relation to others.

#### *A sense of belonging and markers of distinction*

Perceptions of membership in different social groups constitute a significant part of identity processes. They enable individuals to place themselves within certain categories, thus contributing to the negotiation of the self. Membership in certain groups, and the rejection of others, signifies personal traits, needs and desires, which are negotiated to enable individuals to locate themselves within social norms and values. Consumption plays a key role in this process. First, it helps signify the framework of norms and values that individuals should correspond to in order to belong to or distinguish themselves from a given group. Second, it provides individuals with tools to construct a sense of belonging to or distance themselves from that group.

Marilyn Halter's work highlights the links between consumption and constructing and affirming a sense of belonging. Her research focuses on ethnic

groups, revealing how individuals construct a sense of belonging to minority ethnic groups. The analysis here, therefore, also uses the example of ethnicity to demonstrate the links between consumption and a sense of belonging. She claims that

people most often construct their own identities and define others through the commodities they purchase. With the rise of individualism and the evolution of mass consumerism objects become an extension of the self, and this has come to include one's ethnic identification as well (2000, pp. 6-7).

According to Halter, ethnic identification is inextricable from consumer practices. The task of affirming a sense of belonging to a particular ethnic group is in part fulfilled through engaging in distinctive consumer practices. The ways that we shop serve as symbols of our membership to given groups.

The construction of difference is as significant as a sense of belonging in identity processes. The interplay of the two factors is the foundation of identities. The act of distinguishing the self is undertaken through a similar process to the act of forming a sense of belonging. Consumption is also key to these processes, but the attitudes and behaviours of individuals serve to affirm differences rather than similarities. Halter acknowledges the use of consumption to create markers of distinction, claiming that many shop 'as a way not of integrating but rather of distinguishing themselves from the masses' (2000, p. 198). Individuals distinguish themselves through markers of distinction in order to affirm their sense of individuality, and signify this individualism or difference to others. Pierre Bourdieu summarises this process: 'Taste classifies, and it classifies the classifier. Social subjects, classified by their classifications, distinguish themselves by the distinctions they make' (1986, p. 6). The processes of classification by individuals and by others, then, are central to identity processes. First, they contribute to the ways that individuals negotiate their identities. By adopting distinctive consumer behaviours and attitudes, individuals are simultaneously identifying with and distancing themselves from different social groups. In this sense, they are positioning themselves according to a set of social norms and



values. Second, these markers act as a sign to others that they are a member of that group. The acknowledgement of this fact by others feeds into to our self-perceptions, as it affirms our membership to or distinction from different groups.

This project, then, explores how the participants perceive their own consumer attitudes and behaviours and the ways that these compare to their perceptions of others. Their narratives about consumer perceptions indicate which groups they identify with and which they distance themselves from. Importantly, this approach sheds light on the question of an east-west distinction. It addresses whether the participants differentiate the two groups in terms of consumption and where they position themselves in relation to the two groups. Their narratives, therefore, reveal if their perceptions of east Germanness correspond to the east-west distinction, or whether they are more complex than the relatively straightforward groupings outlined in existing research. In addition, because different types of consumption are intrinsically linked to distinctive norms and values, the participants' narratives about consumption provide insights into their self-perceptions in a broader social context.

### Overcoming the complexities of consumption

The analysis of links between consumption, norms and values and identity processes demonstrates why research into consumer perceptions presents itself as a valuable window into identity processes. What is more, consumption has shown itself to be a highly relevant social practice for understanding social change in the shift from socialism to capitalism. It is particularly significant to east Germanness, as many of the popular perceptions of the east in unified Germany are underpinned by ideas about distinctive consumer attitudes and behaviours. Despite its usefulness, however, it should be acknowledged that the study of consumption is an extremely complex and ambiguous field. Ben Fine and Ellen Leopold summarise the vast number of variables which influence consumer attitudes and behaviours:

There are the economic variables of price and income, sociological variables of family and status, psychological variables of motivation and habit, cultural variables of tastes and meaning, and not least the practical variables surrounding the actual activities of shopping, preparation, disposal or even repair. It is inconceivable that any one general theory of consumption will suffice (1993, p. 4).

Different types of consumption are influenced by practical considerations such as price and utility, as well as social and cultural factors relating to symbolically representing the self, which are determined through unconscious forces of habit and conscious decision making. As the overall theme of consumption consists of so many variables, it is too broad and differentiated to be a productive framework for this project. If the participants were asked to discuss their general perceptions, it is likely that they would provide responses on various types of consumption. For example, discussions could range from everyday purchases and grocery shopping to more indulgent consumer activities such as shopping for leisure. In terms of social practice, these types of consumption differ greatly – for instance, some are more likely to be seen as fulfilling basic needs, and others considered to be more decadent. The differences between these consumer practices increase the number of variables at play. That is to say, for example, the participants' perceptions of price, quality, motives and habit are likely to shift depending on the type of consumption that they are discussing. Such an approach would prevent the interviews from being consistent, and thus jeopardise the findings of the study. It is therefore necessary to more tightly define the types of consumption that will be discussed during data collection.

### *Gift-giving*

After researching which types of consumption would be a productive focus for this study, it was decided that gift-giving was the most appropriate. This theme fits to the thesis objectives because the practices are so culturally specific, and thus provide a window into cultural identities. John Sherry (1983) agrees:

gift transactions can be understood as expressive statements or movements in the management of meaning: transaction becomes the basic expressive act by which symbols mediate cultural meanings (p. 157).

As gift-giving is directly linked to cultural meaning, it presents itself as a useful theme for gaining insights into a group whose lives have shifted from a socialist culture to a capitalist culture. It facilitates the exploration of the ways that easterners incorporate their perceptions of their socialist cultural identity into their identity processes in western society. Moreover, gift-giving is an extremely common social practice. It can be assumed that all of the participants for this project will engage in gift-giving in some way. Importantly, it is also a practice which existed in the GDR and plays an important role in contemporary Germany. The special occasions which usually include some form of gift-giving, such as birthdays and Christmas, were celebrated in the GDR and continue to be observed in unified Germany. It is, however, likely to have altered greatly in the transition from socialism to capitalism. It therefore enables research into the participants' perceptions of the past and present.

In order to fully understand the usefulness of the theme of gift-giving for this study, it is important to outline the types of social meanings which play a role in the social practice. This shows how exploring the participants' perceptions of gift-giving will shed light on their perceptions of east Germanness. Sharon Beattie et al., who have carried out research on the cultural meanings of gift-giving, highlight how an individual's values feed into their perceptions:

Value acquisition results from the abstraction of essential principles from life experience. [...] As the abstractions become well articulated, the values influence attitudes, which in turn influence behaviors such as gift-giving behaviors (1991, p. 150).

An individual's perceptions of gift-giving, then, reflect the sets of norms and values within which they frame their identities. Looking more closely at the work of Beattie et al. reveals that the precise values inherent to gift-giving are very relevant to the study of eastern identity. They propose a framework for research

into the practice, focusing specifically on motivation. Again, this framework contributes to the understanding of social values because, as Beattie et al. point out, 'motives and values [...] are closely related conceptually' (ibid). They split their framework into two concepts. The first is called 'gift selection effort', which they describe as 'perceived effort involved in selecting a gift', and the second is 'amount of giving', which they explain as 'perceived amount of gift-giving relative to one's peers and to tradition and reciprocation expectations' (ibid). Most important here are the social values which contribute to these sets of motives, and the relevance of these to understandings of east Germanness in unified Germany. In addition, as Beattie et al. implicitly point out, gift-giving is relational, in that it implies reciprocity. It is therefore useful for shedding light on different forms of interaction with others.

Before outlining the reasons that this framework corresponds to the project's objectives, it is useful to briefly reiterate how the social context of gift-giving changed after unification. In comparison to western consumer societies, the GDR faced a large number of consumable shortages during its existence.<sup>20</sup> This means that, although basic necessities were generally available, more luxurious products, which are most commonly bought as gifts, were harder to come by. In fact, Günther Manz argues that the circulation of western currency in the GDR, which could be spent in shops which sold more luxurious western goods, contributed significantly to gift-buying in the GDR (1991, p. 71). He adds, however, that most easterners were reliant on western contacts when it came to obtaining money from the west, which means that access to it was quite limited (ibid). It is reasonable to assert, then, that handmade gifts were common in the GDR. This perception was echoed during the interviews for this project, where the participants frequently told anecdotes about their mothers and grandmothers making their birthday and Christmas gifts. In addition, it is very possible that,

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<sup>20</sup> Patino and Caldwell (2002) and Merkel (1998) explain the nature of consumerism under socialism in their work on the transition to post-socialism. Their arguments are explained on pp. 26-27.

because of the shortage of consumables, individuals expected to receive relatively few gifts.

The social context of gift-giving under socialism, then, is very different to that in a capitalist society, where goods are more readily available. This is not to say that handmade gifts do not play a role in the western system. Sherry et al. point out that handmade gifts are common under capitalism, and importantly, that they hold different social meanings to gifts with an economic value. They explain that handmade gifts, which require more time and energy, tend to hold a more sentimental value, while gifts with an economic value are understood in terms of decadence and expense (1993, pp. 237-238). The point is that, in a capitalist society, gift-givers have more choice, and handmade gifts have become less of a necessity – in this sense, they can be seen as a less ‘western’ option. This means that the social meanings attached to different types of gifts have shifted. Individuals are not required to expend time and energy to make or obtain gifts. Instead, they are able to express generosity through the amount of money that they spend. Furthermore, because more consumables are available in unified Germany, it is easier to buy a larger number of gifts than in the GDR.

Most important here are the different values which are attached to the different types of gift-giving. This can be understood within the framework set out by Beattie et al. above. For the purposes of this project, ‘gift selection effort’ is interpreted as the amount of time an individual puts into a gift, either on making or choosing it. This type of gift-giving links into values of sentimentality – the focus is not the expense, but the personal meaning of the gift. ‘Amount of giving’ refers to the economic value of the gift and to the number of gifts which are bought. The values behind purchasing a number of gifts, and specifically choosing expensive gifts, correspond to perceptions of materialism, and in particular luxury and/or status. These values correspond to popular perceptions of the east and west in unified Germany. The west is considered to focus more heavily on image and prestige and have a more cosmopolitan outlook when it comes to consumption. Easterners, on the other hand, are said to have responded to perceptions that they are unsophisticated shoppers by emphasising consumer

modesty.<sup>21</sup> These perceived eastern values link closely to the norms and values of the GDR, where easterners had no choice but to consume modestly. According to these perceptions, then, it would be expected that western perceptions of gifts would place more emphasis on economic value and quantity, and that easterners would prioritise personal values, such as time, thought and effort. These straightforward conceptions of east and west do not, however, account for differentiation within the two categories, nor for the fact that easterners have lived within a capitalist system for over two decades. By exploring in-depth how the participants for this research conceptualise gift-giving, the project will reveal the complexities within and between these two categories.

Taking gift-giving as a key theme for the interviews, then, provides insights into how the participants negotiate and understand their east Germanness. Reading their narratives about their perceptions of their own gift-giving shows how they characterise their own social values. These are compared with their perceptions of others' social values, which reveals if they distinguish between the east and west, and how they characterise the two groups. This approach will also shed light on their perceptions of a capitalist consumer society. By discussing their current experiences of gift-giving as well as their childhood experiences in the GDR, they will position their perceptions and values between the past and present.

## Conclusion

This chapter has analysed different theoretical perspectives on identity processes in order to construct a workable analytical framework to enable this project to fill some of the gaps in current research in this field. Deconstructing essentialist and constructivist approaches shows that a significant proportion of existing research on east Germanness is restricted by its essentialist subtext. Scholars who perceive eastern identity to jeopardise German unity appear to stipulate too narrow

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<sup>21</sup> These perceptions link into the idea of the *Zweite-klasse-Mentalität* and are described in full on pp. 34-36.

criteria for a German identity. This approach homogenises German identity processes, failing to account for the influence of space and context which differentiate individuals' perceptions. Therefore, these groups tend to overlook the possibility that individuals hold multiple identifications, and thus exclude east Germanness from Germanness. Hall suggests a constructivist perspective to overcome shortcomings of essentialism. This opens up the avenue for research into how German and east German identifications interact and how they are shaped according to context. The constructivist framework sets the basis for this project, which investigates the sophistication of eastern identity processes. It challenges the idea of a homogenous sense of Germanness, and instead explores how individuals understand past experience in the present context and the different identifications that this process results in.

Having identified the broad theoretical approach for this project, the complex interaction of individuals and discourse were analysed to illustrate how they work together. This revealed that there is no straightforward recipe for identity construction, but that the power relations between individuals and discourse is contested in theoretical literature. Constructionists emphasise that it is primarily individual interaction with different discourses which constructs identities, therefore ascribing individual social actors with a relatively high level of autonomy. Postmodernist theorists, on the other hand, emphasise the power of discourse in identity processes, claiming that individuals are relatively more bound by discourse than constructionists suggest. There are an indefinite number of variables at play in identity processes; the myriad of discourses continuously shifts and alters and identification with these is dependant on individuals, who each have their own experience and understanding through which they view this discourse. These complexities pose a challenge for identity research; however, there are measures that can be taken to overcome them. The first is to look at identity on a case-by-case basis, which enables the researcher to take more of the variables into account. It is for this reason that this project consists of twenty in-depth interviews from a specific group, namely 1970s generation easterners who live in Berlin. The second is to explore how the participants respond to specific

types of discourse. While this does not highlight who is responsible for discourse production, it does demonstrate how the participants identify with dominant discourse and if and how they engage with it in their own understandings.

The complexities of identity research can also be reduced by breaking down how discourse is used in different types of social categorisation, that is, how the participants draw on different discourses in narratives about the self, those with whom they have personal contact, and those whom they have never met. Brubaker's work is useful here, as he differentiates between categorical and relational identifications (2000, p.15). The former refers to formalised categories or meta-narratives (for example, the category 'east German'), which frame identity processes and over which individuals have little control. The latter can be understood as personal relationships, through which individuals can mould their own identities in relation to the formalised categories, so have more autonomy. In one-to-one interaction with friends, family or colleagues, for example, easterners are able to discursively negotiate dominant discourses in order to present themselves. This project investigates how individuals negotiate formalised categories through one-to-one contact by exploring whether they differentiate the east and west, and encouraging them to discuss the categories generically, in relation to their family and friends and themselves. This reveals how the understanding of these categories depends on whether the participants have personal contact with whomever they are discussing and where they locate themselves within these understandings.

Assessing how multiple identities work together is also important in the formation of an analytical framework for identity research. Brubaker points out that individual understandings comprise of a grid of identifications, and that different identifications become prominent in different social situations. Therefore, in order to find out if and how the participants identify as east Germans, the methodology must be modelled to reveal understandings of east Germanness. A balance must be struck here; if the approach is too directed, it may pre-empt the participants' responses, however, if it is too neutral, east



Germanness may not be discussed in the interview, even if the participant does identify as an easterner.

The chapter then moved on to identify the practices and strategies that individuals use to express their identities, which revealed the social practices that should be explored to shed light on identity processes. Two key strategies were pinpointed: discursiveness and consumption. Discursiveness is fundamental to negotiating identities, as individuals locate themselves within discourse through communication with others. This research uses discourse analysis to interpret how the participants linguistically construct personal discourse to position themselves within popular perceptions of east Germanness and in relation to other easterners and westerners. The reasons for selecting consumption as the second strategy are threefold. First, consumption has frequently been heralded as an intrinsic part of identity processes in consumer societies. Consumer preferences and attitudes are formulated according to identifications with social categories, so, exploring narratives about consumption sheds light on the participant's identity process. Second, the social practice of consumption was part of the GDR everyday, and continues to be significant in unified Germany, but its nature has changed dramatically in the shift from socialism to capitalism. Therefore, it presents itself as a potentially fruitful window into how easterners locate themselves between the GDR past and the present context of unified Germany. Third, contemporary east Germanness is frequently associated with consumption in popular discourse. It is therefore likely that this association has filtered through to how easterners understand themselves, which means that consumption is a useful theme for implicitly encouraging easterners to discuss east Germanness.

While consumption presents itself as a useful theme for gaining insights into eastern identity processes, it is important to account for the complexity and diversity of the social practice. Consumption takes many different forms, ranging from everyday and more routine shopping for basic necessities to shopping for leisure. What is more, there is a wealth of variables at play when it comes to formulating consumer perceptions, such as income, motivations, habit, and

cultural norms. In order to construct a workable theoretical and analytical framework which can account for these variables, the theme of consumption must be significantly tightened. It is for this reason that this project has adopted the more specific theme of gift-giving. This form of consumption lends itself to the objectives of the thesis for a number of reasons. First, it is a culturally specific social practice, and as such provides a window into the cultural identities of those engaging in it. Second, it is a practice which existed in the GDR and also plays an important role in unified Germany. In the transition from socialism to capitalism, however, it has changed considerably. Therefore, it presents itself as a useful way of addressing how the participants locate their identities between the past and the present. Third, the sets of values which tie in with perceptions of gift-giving correspond to popular perceptions of the east and west in unified Germany. Beattie's concepts of gift-giving motives are helpful here; these are 'gift selection effort' and 'amount of giving'. The first describes the time, effort and thought which goes into gift-selection. These ideas link into perceptions of easterners, who are often perceived as modest consumers who, perhaps because of their experiences of consumable shortages in the GDR, are less likely to buy expensive objects. The concept 'amount of giving' refers to the economic value of and quantity of gifts. This ties into perceptions of westerners, who are considered to be relatively more driven by consumption, and to focus more on image and status than their eastern counterparts.

Encouraging the participants to discuss how they perceive their own and others' attitudes to gift-giving, then, will reveal how they position themselves and others in relation to these values. It shows how they engage with popular perceptions when making sense of themselves and of easterners and westerners with whom they have different relationships. In turn, this will shed light on the role of the east-west distinction in their conceptions, demonstrating if it is as clear-cut as is commonly claimed in existing research. Overall, the framework paves the way for broader insights into how easterners work with categories to understand themselves and others, and how these understandings shift according to context.

## Chapter Three

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### **Exploring identity processes: A methodological framework**

The research objectives for this thesis have very much determined its methodological design. It is key to ensuring that the research objectives of the study are fulfilled, as well as to the development of useful, valid and reliable data. As shown in the literature review, a large proportion of existing research explores popular narratives which are said to dominate mainstream perceptions of the east in unified Germany. While focusing on the ways that east Germanness is popularly perceived provides valuable insight into broad perceptions of east Germanness, it sheds little light on how easterners themselves interact with these perceptions and understand them in their own identity processes. Understanding east Germanness also requires research into both narratives and everyday interaction, which is what this thesis relates to. This approach breaks the circle which appears to occur in a large proportion of current research. Rather than focusing on the popular perceptions, which are often said to denigrate the east, in order to understand east Germanness, it explores how easterners themselves negotiate their identity processes. The qualitative in-depth approach adopted here focuses on individuals' eastern identity processes to shed light on the relationship between individuals and popular perceptions. It aims to show if and how individuals engage with these perceptions when negotiating their own east Germanness and constructing images of other easterners. In short, it takes easterners as the starting point, rather than popular discourse about the east.

This chapter begins by looking at the research objectives in more detail, and explaining how a qualitative approach exploring the intricacies and complexities of social processes of identification ensures that each of these aims are met. The following section addresses reflexivity as a fundamental tool for a valid and reliable qualitative research project. As required for the practice of reflexivity, this section questions how my own experiences, characteristics and interpretation may have influenced the research process. Openly acknowledging them and

taking measures to restrict the extent to which they affect the study makes for more reliable and valid findings. The focus then turns to the target group for the study, outlining the importance of selecting a specific group to overcome the generalisations that emerge so frequently from other work in this field. This section also clarifies why the group, which consists of easterners of the 1970s generation who live in Berlin, was selected for the study. Having identified the overarching methodological approach and the target group of the study, the chapter goes on to look at the specific methods which have been selected, namely semi-structured interviews and discourse analysis. The sections on each of these methods take the same structure, explaining why the method fits to the requirements of the study and the difficulties and complexities that each one involves. They then describe how each method was applied in the project to respond to the research objectives and the strategies that were put in place to manage and overcome these complexities. Focus then turns to the ethical factors that were taken into consideration in the methodological design to demonstrate how the project fulfils the ethical guidelines for carrying out research in a social setting. Finally, the concluding section summarises the rationale behind the methodological decisions made for this study. It looks at the measures that have been taken in each stage of the research process to ensure validity, which refers to the quality of the data and achievement of the research aims, and reliability, which concerns the consistency and trustworthiness of the methods (Denscombe, 2010, p. 106).

### **The objectives of a qualitative framework**

The research aims of this project emerged from reviewing existing academic literature in the field of east Germanness and identifying the gaps within the field. This revealed under-researched areas, such as qualitative research focusing on the ways that easterners themselves construct a sense of east Germanness. Some researchers have indeed explored east Germanness from a qualitative perspective, but this body of literature makes up a comparatively small

proportion of the large amount of academic work which has been published on eastern identities.<sup>22</sup> The existing qualitative research was mainly published in the first decade after unification, which means there has been little to explore the ways in which eastern identities have developed in the second decade of a unified Germany. The literature review also highlighted research findings which appear to have been shaped heavily by the implicit assumptions of the researcher, particularly when it came to preconceived ideas about what German unity *should* entail. These areas require further exploration from a more reflexive standpoint, which ensures that any preconceived ideas are acknowledged and therefore accounted for more explicitly in the research findings. Before explaining why a qualitative methodology was selected it is useful to briefly recap exactly what the study will explore.<sup>23</sup> It intends to reveal how the participants construct a sense of east Germanness in contemporary Germany. This entails exploring how their GDR past influences their perceptions of the present, and how their experiences of unified Germany feed into the ways that they conceptualise and express their east Germanness. This approach will also demonstrate how the participants respond to and interact with popular perceptions of the east in their identity processes, so how they negotiate or are shaped by mainstream perceptions. This includes examining how popular perceptions feed into their self-perceptions, the ways that they view other easterners and how they believe that they are perceived by westerners. The east-west distinction is also very significant to this project, as it is often presented as the foundations for eastern

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<sup>22</sup> The most well known anthropological contributors to the field are Daphne Berdahl (1999a, 1999b, 2000, 2001), Dominic Boyer (2000, 2001) and Elizabeth Ten Dyke (2000, 2001). Anselma Gallinat (2006, 2009) has also carried out a significant amount of anthropological research into perceptions of the east among victims of the SED regime.

<sup>23</sup> The research questions for the project are:

- Do participants make a distinction between the east and west, and if so, where do they locate themselves in this categorisation?
- How do the participants respond to and interact with popular perceptions of east Germanness?
- How have easterners' conceptions of east Germanness been shaped and what drives them?
- How do participants identify with unified Germany, and how do their conceptions of east Germanness fit in with this?

These are explained in full on pp. 55-57.

identity processes in existing literature.<sup>24</sup> The methodology is therefore designed to find out the extent to which this distinction influences the participants' perceptions, and how these shift in different forms of social interaction. The interviews encouraged the participants to discuss their perceptions of the past and present. From these narratives, I am able to locate their perceptions between the GDR past and present of unified Germany to reveal what drives and shapes their conceptions of east Germanness. This also shows whether and how their east German understandings fit into a sense of Germanness.

Addressing the above objectives requires a methodological framework which facilitates in-depth research into identity processes. It should enable the exploration of the complex relationship between individuals, popular perceptions and shifts in social interaction and context. The methodology should also correspond to the constructivist theoretical framework on identity processes. As the name suggests, this approach highlights that identities are continually constructed according to social context, which alludes to place and the other people with whom individuals are interacting when articulating identities. Constructivism also emphasises the fluidity and ambiguity of identities, and that individuals hold multiple identifications at any one time.<sup>25</sup> The instability of identities and the number of variables which shape them also demonstrate why it is so important that the methodological framework lends itself to the in-depth research of specific cases. These complexities can only be taken into account on a case-by-case basis – a more generic study would overlook the ambiguities and variables which are central to identity processes.

It is for these reasons that qualitative methods have been selected for this project. These have been designed to gain in-depth insights into how individuals construct understandings on an everyday basis and in an everyday context, focusing on their social interaction with discourse and other people. Bruce L. Berg explains that:

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<sup>24</sup> Analysis of the role of the east-west distinction can be found on pp. 25-26, and the concept of the *Mauer im Kopf* is explored on pp. 32-34.

<sup>25</sup> Constructivist approaches to identity studies are analysed in the theoretical framework on pp. 61-65.

Qualitative techniques allow researchers to share in the understandings and perceptions of others and to explore how people structure and give meaning to their daily lives. Researchers using qualitative techniques examine how people learn about and make sense of themselves and others (2004, p. 7).

The approach therefore facilitates the exploration of how individuals construct their perceptions and meanings of east Germanness and Germanness in their daily lives. Additionally, it lends itself to the investigation of how individuals identify themselves according to the way that they understand others and how others understand them. These methodological features will therefore be particularly helpful for addressing the research questions on how east Germanness is perceived, whether its understandings sit comfortably with those of Germanness and how participants interact with westerners.

Within the qualitative paradigm, it is the interpretive approach which is the most useful for this thesis. Joseph Maxwell (1992), who has published extensively on qualitative methodologies, explains that the interpretive approach is primarily 'concerned with what [...] objects, events, and behaviors *mean* to the people engaged and with them' [author's italics] (p. 288). For the purposes of this thesis the interpretive approach paves the way for understanding what events such as the unification process, distinctive behaviours associated with the east and west and mainstream labels, such as *Ostalgie* or *Ossi* mean to the participants. In this sense, it enables the deconstruction of the different meanings which the participants associate with and use to negotiate a sense of east Germanness. It therefore facilitates the in-depth exploration of eastern identity processes from different angles, which, taken together, will provide a fuller picture of the meaning of east Germanness among the participants.

It is also important to note that the interpretive approach is underpinned by the idea of subjective interpretations. As Clifford Geertz (1973) points out in his groundbreaking work on interpretive theory, 'what we call our data are really our own constructions of other people's constructions of what they and their compatriots are up to' (p. 9). The findings which are drawn from the fieldwork

material are not only dependent on the meanings understood by the participants, but on the way in which I, as the researcher, interpret these meanings. Geertz goes on to explain that, given the constructivist grounding of interpretive research, these subjectivities are inevitable, and in fact fit into the ways in which realities are socially constructed. As Geoff Walsham (2006) clarifies, 'interpretive methods of research start from the position that our knowledge of reality [...] is a social construction by human actors' (p. 320). The issue of subjectivities has not only been contested with reference to interpretive research, but also more generally to qualitative methodologies as a whole. A number of methods have been adopted in this thesis to ensure the validity of its findings, including reflexivity and interview and data analysis consistency. These are explained in full below.

What is currently lacking from this justification for the use of qualitative methods is how they will address the research question on popular perceptions of the east which are said to dominate in contemporary Germany. Exploring social interaction without acknowledging overarching discourse sheds little light on the influence of meta-narratives over identity processes. Looking at how the qualitative school of thinking has developed to tackle this issue is helpful here, as it describes some of the techniques that will be used in this project to engage with the question of popular perceptions. Qualitative methods are traditionally based on symbolic interactionism, a term coined by sociologist Herbert Blumer in the 1960s. Blumer outlines three premises on which the theoretical standpoint is based:

The first premise is that human beings act towards things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them. [...] The second premise is that the meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one's fellows. The third premise is that these meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretive process used by the person in dealing with the things he encounters (1986, p. 2).

Most striking about the premises described here is the focus that is given to individuals in the construction of meanings. This implies that the processes take



place only in day-to-day social interaction and makes no mention of the influence of meta-narratives and popular perceptions. By positing day-to-day interaction, where individuals play an active role, as the main arena for the creation of meanings, and overlooking the role of resonant discourses, over which individuals have little control, symbolic interactionists are advancing individuals as key agents in meaning construction. It is this tendency which is said to explain the move away from symbolic interactionist theories and towards postmodernism over the last few decades.<sup>26</sup> Although postmodernist theorists actually share many constructivist viewpoints with social interactionists, their research focuses more on the power of discourse in the formulation of meaning. The line is, however, very fine, with neither camps denying the importance of discourse or individual interaction; they do, nevertheless, emphasise different ends of the spectrum. Peter Callero, who has explored why the two theoretical perspectives have failed to converge despite their similarities, highlights the subtle difference between symbolic interactionism and postmodernism:

The self conceived in this [symbolic interactionist] way allows for agency, creative action, and the possibility of emancipatory political movements. It does not preclude the very real possibility that the self-regulating processes of reflexivity will come to be colonized by forces of domination and control, but it does show how resistance is always on the horizon of the possible (2003, p. 120).

For postmodernists then, the concern is the amount of agency ascribed to individuals by symbolic interactionists, and thus their suggestion that a degree of control over the dominant forces of discourse is a real possibility. Callero goes on to note however, that the postmodern focus on the power of discourse is not without its flaws:

The value of these efforts is that they provide a perspective of distance that directs our attention to common sociological forces that control, limit, and

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<sup>26</sup> The nuances between symbolic interactionism and postmodernism in qualitative approaches are comparable to those between constructionist and postmodern theories of identity, which are outlined on pp. 69-71.

define the construction process in common ways. At their best they can offer insight into the changing definitions and meaning of the public person. Yet there is also a danger in that the wide generalizations of these analyses can sweep over the multi-dimensional, overlapping, and shifting cultural meanings of self (2003, p. 122).

Analysing these two schools of thought demonstrates that it may be useful to draw from both ends of the spectrum. This requires a methodological framework which allows the researcher to explore the power dimensions in the relationship between social interaction between individuals and meta-narratives which feed into popular perceptions. A number of different popular perceptions have been selected to investigate these dynamics in this project. The first idea relates *Ostalgie*, a label referring to nostalgia for the GDR which can be interpreted as a sign that easterners wish for the return of the GDR.<sup>27</sup> The other perceptions relate primarily to economic circumstances and consumption. Since unification, the east has suffered far higher rates of unemployment than the west. This is not only likely to have fed into perceptions that easterners are underprivileged compared to their western counterparts, but also that they have not adapted to the work ethic of a capitalist society. Perceptions of consumption are also significant, since this social practice has continued to be a part of everyday life for easterners since unification, but its nature has changed dramatically. What is more, following the fall of the Wall, easterners were often popularly characterised by the way that they were perceived to consume. They were seen as rather inexperienced and unsophisticated shoppers who had failed to get to grips with western consumption.<sup>28</sup> The fieldwork for this project is designed to encourage the participants to discuss these themes according to their own understandings. Their narratives will then be deconstructed using a combination of critical and linguistic discourse analysis to ascertain if and how they engage with the popular perceptions and use them to formulate their own meanings. This methodological technique will ensure that the project moves away from the tendency to focus

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<sup>27</sup> The popular connotations of *Ostalgie* are often interpreted as a tendency to look backwards and hold wistful attachments to the GDR, and thus fail to move forwards into the context of unified Germany, as explained in more depth on pp. 29-32.

<sup>28</sup> Pp. 26-32 outline the popular perceptions which present easterners as a distinctive type of consumer.

research on east Germanness primarily on popular understandings. At the same time, it will avoid the danger of going too far in the opposite direction by looking only at social interaction and overlooking the role of resonant discourses.

### **Reflexivity: An integral part of the research**

Reflexivity on the part of the researcher has become an increasingly important aspect of validating qualitative interpretive projects. The issue arose during the 1980s alongside the acknowledgement that ‘as social researchers we are integral to the social world we study’ (Mauthner, 2003, p. 416). This means that as active social beings, researchers bring their own values, judgments and perceptions which have been formed through social experience and are used daily by the researcher to make sense of the world around them. These preconceptions inevitably influence how the researcher carries out research into the social world, and how they analyse it. In short, as Martyn Denscombe explains, ‘the means we have for constructing and interpreting our social world are the same as those for studying it’ (2010, p. 91). This poses a problem in terms of the validity of the research, as illustrated by sceptics of the approach who criticise its subjective and partial nature (Malterud, 2001, p. 483). The issue of validity is exacerbated because, as contextual studies into fluid social phenomena, the research is neither replicable nor intended to be generalisable. It is therefore not possible to strengthen qualitative research findings through re-testing.

Qualitative interpretive researchers have responded to these criticisms by practising reflexivity in their work, that is to say by recognising their preconceptions and the impact they may have on the outcome of their research. It is misleading to claim that reflexivity eliminates the subjective nature of interpretive projects – as social actors interpreting social phenomena, eradicating subjective interpretations would be an impossible endeavour for interpretive researchers (Malterud, 2001, p. 484). Nevertheless, social researchers can validate their work by becoming critically aware of their preconceptions and applying methodological strategies to overcome these as far as possible. The limitations of

the work should be openly acknowledged so that any skewness can be accounted for by the reader. Reflexive methods, as Denscombe states, involve the researcher striving for as high a degree of detachment (distance from the research subject) and open-mindedness (neutrality, impartiality and lack of vested interests) as possible (2010, p. 83). Additionally, the level of reflexivity in the project should be continually assessed, both by the researcher carrying out the work and other researchers (Malterud, 2001, p. 484). Kirsti Malterud goes on to explain that, if a high level of reflexivity is practised, 'personal issues can be valuable sources for relevant and specific research' (ibid). Therefore, reflexivity is not only a method limiting the impact of personal subjectivities on social research, but also of constructively using the researcher's personal experience to enrich the findings.

Given that a number of the research questions for this project were formulated in response to the implicit assumptions of other scholars in the field of east Germanness, it was particularly important that reflexivity was practised in this project. Furthermore, the impact that implicit assumptions have on research findings, as demonstrated in the literature review, suggests that a reflexive study could shed new light on east Germanness.<sup>29</sup> The remainder of this section, then, will outline the reflexive practices that have been used during this study. It documents how I have attempted to account for my own preconceptions, as well as how my characteristics as a researcher may have shaped the participants' interview responses.

Perhaps my most striking characteristic as a researcher of east Germanness is my nationality – being British has been both beneficial and problematic during the research project. One of the main advantages relates to detachment, as before I formed the idea for the thesis, I had spent very little time in Germany. Since I had not been surrounded by German popular perceptions of unification, its supposed

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<sup>29</sup> Pp. 39-43 explore the claims made by scholars such as Gensicke (1995, 1998) and Goll and Leurer (2004) that successful unity in Germany requires easterners to identify completely with western norms and values. They therefore problematise east Germanness for jeopardising this process and potentially also German inner unity. These assumptions prevent the researchers in this group from being open to the possibility that east Germanness can exist alongside or even be a part of Germanness.

difficulties, east-west relations and the issue of east Germanness, as I would have been had I been living in Germany, my views had not been implicitly influenced by popular claims. The first time I encountered the matter of east Germanness was in a university setting, where you are encouraged to think critically and challenge the claims you are faced with. Therefore, when I did go on to live in Berlin, I was very conscious of the contestation which surrounded eastern identity. I experienced it firsthand during social events with my work colleagues, who taught at a school in the centre of Berlin, and were made up of both east and west Germans. I was struck by the frequency with which unification, and particularly the issue of east and west is discussed in informal settings in Berlin. My distance from Germany and introduction to east Germanness in an academic setting, however, meant that I was more likely to question both overarching and everyday discourse on east Germanness than someone who had engaged with the discourse as part of their everyday life. Moreover, as I am neither west German nor east German, I have no vested interest in showing either party in a more positive light. In this sense my research objective corresponds to Denscombe's claim that reflexive research should have no other agenda than to 'the quest for knowledge itself' (2010, p. 82).

Questions of distance and open-mindedness became more complex as the project progressed. There have been two key points in the process where it was difficult to maintain a reasonable degree of objectivity. The first was during in the literature review, where my own pluralist viewpoint meant I regarded some bodies of literature, namely those which present east Germanness as a problem for German unity, more critically than others. Consequently, I risked overlooking the implicit assumptions present in some of the existing research in the field which takes a pluralist perspective and therefore is less likely to problematise eastern identities. The second was during the data analysis phase, where I struggled to maintain distance from the individuals I had interviewed. Having met them personally and listened to their stories, I struggled not to become sympathetic to their interests and to critically analyse their interview responses. This was intensified because my interviews were carried out only with

easterners, and thus I had no material with westerners with which to balance my views. Both of these occasions were resolved thanks to the fact I am a doctoral student and therefore my work is frequently assessed by others, namely my supervisors, which as Malterud stated above, is an important reflexive technique in itself. During the supervision process my supervisors first made me aware that I was falling prey to my own assumptions, which prompted me to look more critically at the all of the literature. Second, they suggested strategies to reintroduce distance between the participants and myself, which involved setting aside the interview material, in which I had been immersed for months, and returning to alternative literature on east Germanness, thereby reminding myself of other perspectives in the field.

Being British also influenced how the participants of the study perceived me. Most were surprised to hear that a person outside of Germany would have any interest in east Germanness, and did not expect me to have any knowledge of the GDR. My age is also likely to have influenced the participants' perceptions that I was rather naive when it came to knowledge of socialism. I was in my mid-twenties when I carried out the fieldwork, so approximately a decade younger than the participants. What is more, I have no personal memory of the fall of the Wall, or the time before it when the GDR existed. This assumed naivety was a characteristic that I was able to make use of during the interview process. As I made no mention of my familiarity with the history of the GDR, participants are likely to have given more detailed responses to questions about GDR life than they may have done if they thought I had knowledge of the GDR. There were numerous occasions where participants assumed that I had little knowledge of the GDR. One example of this was in discussions about the *Intershop* (shops selling western products that existed in the GDR), which the participants assumed I was completely unaware of. They therefore provided detailed narratives about their experiences of the *Intershop*, and within these a significant amount of information about how they identify with these memories of the past. In general, therefore, my interviews comprised of very full accounts for analysis, which

enriched my findings on how individuals negotiate their GDR past in unified Germany.

Furthermore, as I have no link with east or west Germany, I was considered to be an 'outsider' by the participants. This dynamic cannot be described as beneficial or problematic, but it was without doubt influential. It is inevitable that the responses of the participants would have been different if they had been talking to another easterner or a westerner. From the findings of the interviews, where participants tended to become defensive when discussing western perceptions of the east, it is likely that the participants would have been more closed and defiant had I been a westerner. The sense of collectivity that the participants expressed with easterners from younger generations suggests that, had I been an easterner, participants would not have taken on the role of the 'informer', but would have assumed shared experiences.

Finally, the interview process is likely to have been shaped by German being my second language. Care was taken while preparing the interview that the language and vocabulary used was as neutral as possible, and that I was aware of the more controversial terminology surrounding east Germanness (*Ossi, Wessi, Ostalgie*). Before conducting the fieldwork, a native speaker of German read the interview questions to ensure they sounded idiomatic and contained no loaded terms. During the interviews, I consciously followed the participant's lead with regard to 'eastern' vocabulary by using the same labels and terminology in my questions. This served two purposes: first that the interviews gave insight into the vocabulary used by participants in their daily processes of meaning construction, and second that, if participants used dominant terminology on east Germanness, it was according to their own understandings rather than mine.

### **Target group: 1970s generation easterners living in Berlin**

The target group for this project is those who live in Berlin, were born in the GDR between 1970 and 1980 and spent their childhood in the socialist state until unification. The group, which is referred to as the 1970s generation throughout

this thesis, were aged between nine and nineteen years when the Wall fell, so had spent more than half their lives and virtually all of their adult lives in unified Germany at the time of interview. Perhaps more importantly, they had not completed their education at the time of unification, so have also spent their whole working lives in unified Germany. The participants came from a range of class, educational, occupational and familial backgrounds and, of the twenty interviewees, twelve were female and eight were male (a complete overview of each of the participants' backgrounds is provided in appendix 3). These factors were all considered during the analytical process to ensure that their possible influence on how individuals understand east Germanness was taken into account.

Selecting a specific age group for this project sets it apart from the majority of research on east Germanness, which, as demonstrated in the literature review, tends to examine easterners as an aggregate group, therefore not acknowledging the possibility of differentiation within this category. It would be misleading to suggest that there are no studies which specify an age-group in their research.<sup>30</sup> The generational research which exists, however, adopts quantitative methods, and so does not consist of the same in-depth aims and findings as this project. The literature review did not reveal any generational research from the relatively few scholars who do take a qualitative perspective in this field.<sup>31</sup> It should be acknowledged that narrowing the focus to a particular age group does limit the findings of the research, which will only shed light on eastern identity processes within this generation. On the other hand, however, focusing on a more specific group facilitates the emergence of more focused and in-depth findings. This approach also fits more closely with the conventions of qualitative research, which is not intended to provide generalisable data, but in-depth insights into a particular phenomenon. The decision to focus specifically on this age group was made in part because they were at a very impressionable stage of life when the

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<sup>30</sup> For example, Gerd Brenner (1997a, 1997b) and Peter Forster (2006) have carried out significant quantitative studies into younger generations of easterners.

<sup>31</sup> See pp. 24-25 for more information about the focus of existing qualitative research in the field.



Wall fell, when individuals begin to develop independence from their parents and draw on a wider social sphere to construct an identity. They are the youngest generation to have had firsthand experience of the GDR, but, while they have personal memories of the socialist state, they have articulated their adult identities in unified Germany.

The significance of this group to the study of eastern identity is reinforced by the number of autobiographical texts focusing on east Germanness which have been published over the last decade. Works such as Jana Hensel's *Zonenkinder* (2002), Claudia Rusch's *Meine freie deutsche Jugend* (2003) and Jakob Hein's *Mein erstes T-Shirt* (2001), all written by members of this age group, document the consequences of managing such dramatic social change during adolescence. The issues raised in these texts tend to be more nuanced and ambiguous than those often cited in literature on eastern identity. As noted above, existing literature often focuses on broad perceptions of eastern identity, which risks overlooking the complexities of easterners' own understandings. The emergence of so many autobiographical texts from this age group and their suggestion that conceptions of east Germanness are more complex than is currently claimed constitute a key motivation for the study of this generation, and also for the choice of a qualitative methodological model. Exploring the 1970s generation aims to shed light on how a generation that was socialised in a socialist state, but experiences adulthood under capitalism, understands and relates to their socialist past and negotiates the features of the two the systems in their identity processes. Carrying out an in-depth and small-scale study has the potential to reveal differentiation within the bracket of east Germanness and address the nuances and complexities of identity processes.

A further selection criterion of the sample is that they participants lived in Berlin when the fieldwork was carried out. This decision was made for a number of reasons. At the beginning of the project, the intention was a comparative study between Berlin and a more rural town in the east. During the pilot study, however, it became clear that such an approach would produce quite a breadth of findings, and that a comparative study would ultimately be less in-depth than a

single case study. It was therefore decided that a single case study would better meet the requirements of the research objectives – it would yield more focused, and therefore more manageable, material, which ultimately would ensure the in-depth analysis of the complex processes by which the participants make sense of their east Germanness.<sup>32</sup> The choice of Berlin as the case study was made partly for practical purposes – I had already lived in Berlin, so knew that it would be possible to advertise for participants at the primary school in which I worked. Furthermore, I had friends in Berlin who generously offered me accommodation throughout the fieldwork phase. This reduced the economic costs of the data collection, which meant that I was able to spend more time in the city and therefore carry out more interviews in total and repeat interviews where necessary.

Practical reasons aside, Berlin presented itself as a favourable case study because the city itself has such a unique history. During the Cold War, Berlin was divided in two, and so experienced its own form of perhaps more intense unification after 1989. Andreas Glaeser notes in his work on identity processes among the Berlin police that, ‘Berlin [...] is in many ways a special case’ (1998, p. 9). He elaborates on this claim, explaining that

Berlin and the Wall that divided it were the ultimate icons of the division of Germany and of Europe. [...] Berlin also became the symbol of German unification. Moreover, Berlin is the only state in Germany which actively blended east and west – the only state which had to create east-west administrative structures (2000, pp. 18-19).

Before unification the city was already home to both easterners and westerners, so unification inevitably led to a high level of east-west interaction. This was less the case in other parts of the east, where cities and towns were inhabited only by easterners, and so after unification the population was likely to have less day-to-day contact with westerners. Given that east-west relations are deemed to play a

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<sup>32</sup> The merits of small-scale case studies are often highlighted in literature about interview-based interpretive research. For example, Mira Crouch and Heather McKenzie (2006) point out that a tighter target group ‘facilitate[s] the researcher’s close association with the respondents, and enhance[s] the validity of fine-grained, in-depth inquiry’ (p. 483).

defining role in understandings of east Germanness, this dynamic in Berlin enabled this thesis to look more closely at how easterners perceive interactions with westerners than would be possible in other parts of the new *Länder*. Since easterners living in Berlin experience everyday interaction with westerners, the project could explore further how the participants perceived westerners with whom they had personal contact as well as their generic conceptions of westerners. Furthermore, as Glaeser notes, Berlin has become a 'symbol of German unification' – a status which is reflected by the products on offer to tourists in the city, which effectively crystallise the debates surrounding identity processes in unified Germany. Shops stock a range of unification souvenirs ranging from pieces and pictures of the Wall to *Ampelmännchen*, a figure which served as the pedestrian crossing figure in the GDR and has been marketed as a cult icon of the east since unification. Importantly, these products enjoy far less success in other parts of the east. The participants, then, live in a city which is at least partly defined by unification, particularly when it comes to consumption, and where they are continually faced with unification symbols, which may feed into eastern identity processes. Therefore, as the place where unification is likely to have been felt most intensely and a city in which daily east-west interaction is inevitable, Berlin presents itself as a unique and special case study which could shed light onto eastern identity processes. Pragmatically speaking, focusing on easterners who live in Berlin rather than comparing them to those who live elsewhere in the east removes some of the numerous variables that would need to be considered to validate such a project. Restricting these complexities enables the project to incorporate the in-depth ambiguities and intricacies of identity processes, which would have been granted less attention in a broader study.

## Interviews

Following the formulation of the research questions and design of the theoretical framework for this project, it was decided that semi-structured interviews were the most appropriate research method. The design of this approach benefits the

project because it enables the participants to steer the direction that the interview takes and generates rich and detailed material, providing the researcher with texts which deal with the variable and complex processes of identity construction. The complexities of identity processes also played a significant role in the decision to recruit twenty participants for interview. In their work on interview-based qualitative research, Mira Crouch and Heather McKenzie (2006) point out that, when it comes to research which 'seeks to penetrate social life beyond appearance and manifest social meanings', it is logical to have a sample of approximately twenty participants (p. 483). They explain that such research

requires the researcher to be immersed in the research field, to establish continuing, fruitful relationships with respondents and through theoretical contemplation to address the research problem in depth (ibid.).

Interviewing twenty participants provided rich and in-depth material, which was then embedded in existing theories about east German identities. This method brought to light the complex consistencies and ambiguities within each participant's narrative, and across the whole body of narratives. Once grounded in existing research, the depth of the material proved useful in shedding further light on some of the most dominant theories in the field as well as bringing new theories to light.

This section further explains the choice to carry out in-depth interviews, elaborating why semi-structured interviewing acts as a window into social life and encompasses the sophisticated and at times contradictory processes at play. It then goes on to look more precisely at the interview design for this project, explaining both the preparatory phase and the actual interview process, to demonstrate how it corresponds to the methodological requirements and how the techniques within this method ensure that the aims of the research questions are met.

The decision to conduct interviews to gather material for this project was made in part because of their documented success in providing insights into the construction of social understandings. Jonathan Potter explains that, 'interviews

are used as a technique for obtaining information that will enable the analyst to describe, explain, and/or predict social actions that occur outside the interview' (1985, p. 247). Potter's use of the verbs 'explain' and 'describe' demonstrates the in-depth material achieved by interviews, which goes beyond superficial claims and explores how context and peculiarities are explained and described by individuals.

Also important about the above quotation is the distinction between the social world and the interview. While, as Potter notes, interviews are widely accepted to provide insight into social action, the relatively contrived nature of the interview situation must be taken into account when considering the validity of the findings. Michael Brenner addresses this issue in his work, acknowledging that 'the reporting of information is [...] necessarily and inevitably embedded in a social situation, the interview, with its own peculiar social psychological organization' (1985, p. 151). Given that the purpose of interviews is to explore individuals' understandings within the context of their social world, it is important that the researcher acknowledges the impact that the peculiarity of the interview situation may have on research findings. The researcher should also take measures to make the interview situation as 'natural' as possible to ensure it is not too distinct from everyday social situations. Measures taken here, as explained in more detail in the section on preparing for the interview, involved setting the interview in a relaxed atmosphere and according to the participant's terms, so that they felt at ease and in control.

The need for a 'natural' interview set-up also led to the selection of semi-structured interviews, which, unlike more formal and structured interview methods, ascribe a good degree of control to the participant over the direction taken in the interview because of their relatively fluid nature. This interview technique enhances the 'natural' setting because, as participants steer the direction of the interview, they feel in control and therefore more comfortable. Furthermore, the fluid nature of the interview ensures that themes which do not appear in existing literature, but are considered significant by the participants, are able to emerge during the interview. This would not be the case in more

structured interview processes, where participants are asked only to respond to set questions. At the same time, the facilitator role played by the researcher during the interview ensures the participant does not digress from the general theme, which would generate irrelevant material. Potter explains the dynamics of the facilitator-respondent relationship in interviews:

The investigator has in mind certain topics that seem to be important in the light of previous research, but which are too complex to be defined in detail in advance. [...] Attempts [should be] made to ensure that these topics [are] covered in every interview, but in a way that allow[s] respondents to talk freely and at length and that make it possible for these topics to occur naturally (1985, p. 248).

It is therefore the responsibility of the researcher to strike the correct balance: on the one hand, they must guide the respondent to ensure they cover the central interview themes. On the other hand, they must not restrict the responses of the interviewee with their questioning, but ensure that they are given enough freedom to give detailed and unrestricted responses and for unforeseen themes to emerge.

The design of the questions is fundamental to ensuring the researcher strikes the correct balance as a facilitator. They must be formulated so as to open the way for in-depth discussion and to be as neutral as possible to avoid influencing the participant's response. If the participant is able to talk freely and at length about a topic, their narrative is more likely to contain the detail required by the researcher to understand how the participant has interpreted the question and constructed his or her answer. Brenner acknowledges the significance of question formulation in his work, where he raises concerns about closed questioning: 'The employability of such an approach in interviewing assumes, first and foremost, that the multitude of acts of perceiving is unproblematic' (1985, p. 148). Questions which do not allow the participant's own interpretations to emerge are problematic. They hinder the qualitative objective of revealing how individuals understand social situations and negotiate their identities according to it, which is one of the key purposes of this project. Therefore, the questions for the

interviews here will follow Brenner's model of nondirective questioning (1985, p. 151), which requires removing the researcher's assumptions from the question formulation. An example from the interviews used for this project is helpful to demonstrate this model – a theme discussed in the interview is the *Ampelmännchen*, which as noted above is widely perceived as a cult figure of the east (see, for example, Bartmanski, 2011; Velikonja, 2009). However, although it may be assumed that the participant would link the figure to east Germanness, incorporating this assumption into the question would influence and restrict the response. So, rather than asking: 'Do you see the *Ampelmännchen* as a typically east German symbol', the researcher should neutralise the question and say: 'Can you tell me a bit about the *Ampelmännchen*'. The second formulation does not link the figure to east Germanness, which risks pre-empting the participant's response, and is much more open, which would enable the interviewee's own views to emerge.

Although the questions were designed to be open and thus encourage the participants to give detailed responses, there were occasions during the data collection when the narrative given by the interviewee lacked the depth required for the project. At these points I drew on what the participants had said to construct probing questions which prompted further information. This often happened, for example, when participants were asked to compare their own childhood attitudes to gifts to those of children in contemporary Germany. Many participants responded to this question by simply stating that there are differences because today's children are growing up in a capitalist society. I then encouraged them to elaborate by explaining what the differences were, which revealed where they located themselves between the two sets of attitudes. This strategy adapted the interview to correspond to the individual needs of the participants in terms of their willingness to respond and talkativeness. Probing questions were, however, used only to supplement the main interview design, which as Daphne Keats highlights, should remain uniform for all of the interviews:

The core set of questions has to remain constant while probing can explore reasons and account for individual differences. [...] Reliability in relation to interviewing [...] refers to the degree of consistency that the interview has for the person or persons interviewed (2000, pp. 75-76).

The use of probing questions, then, ensured that a sufficient amount of depth and detail was acquired during each interview, but following the overall interview design meant that supplementary questions did not jeopardise the consistency or reliability of the study.

In addition to question formulation, researchers should bear in mind that their own body language and reactions to the interviewee's discourse may sway the responses. In many ways the personal interaction that takes place in the interview situation adds to the 'natural' setting and puts the participant at ease. Nevertheless, as Herbert Rubin points out, this interaction is a two-sided coin:

Personal involvement is a great strength [...], because empathy encourages people to talk, and yet active involvement in the interview can also create problems, as your own emotions as biases can influence what you ask and how your interviewee responds (2005, p. 31).

Therefore, although the interaction between the interviewer and the participant benefits the process, the researcher must ensure that it does not influence the interviewee and acknowledge any possible impact when the data is analysed. During the interview the researcher should be mindful about adopting a neutral stance (Brenner, 1985, p. 151), which means they should not express personal views and attempt to restrict any implicit indication of their opinions. It is, however, inevitable that, as one human interacting with another, the researcher's body language will have some influence on the participant. During the data collection for this project this was taken into account in a fieldwork diary, which was written shortly after each interview was carried out. Here I recorded my perceptions of how well the interview had been carried out, how the interviewee had reacted and if anything had happened which appeared to influence the respondent. The research diary was then frequently referred to alongside the interview transcripts during the process of data analysis, where it served to



contextualise and further clarify certain aspects of the interview. The section on reflexivity above also details characteristics of mine that were anticipated to shape how the participants perceived me and the possible consequences of this for the interview data.

### Organising the interview

Finding interviewees for this project was very much helped by contacts I made when working at a school in the centre of Berlin between 2006 and 2007. I was able to publicise the project and request volunteers for interview using a poster which was put onto the school notice boards (see appendices 1 and 2). The poster specified the group being sought for interview and briefly explained the focus of the study as attitudes to consumption, and especially gift-giving, in the new *Länder*. The description made no mention of eastern identity, which is quite a loaded idea in the German public sphere. Therefore it was not so explicit that it risked skewing the interview process, but was overt enough to fulfil the ethical guidelines of the project.<sup>33</sup> Five people responded to the poster, and after their interviews, were given cards containing my contact details to give to other potential participants. Thanks to this my sample size quickly snowballed and I was able to conduct interviews with twenty individuals from a variety of backgrounds (a full description of each of the participants backgrounds is provided in appendix 3). It is important to note that the participants volunteered for this project, as this sampling dynamic is likely to have influenced the data. That the participants volunteered suggests that they have a desire to tell their story, an assumption that was substantiated by the enthusiasm and animation of the respondents during the interview. The findings of the interviews may have differed if potential participants had been directly approached and asked to take part, as this may have provoked a sense of obligation.

As noted above, it was important to make the interview setting as 'natural' as possible to fulfil the aim of looking at how understandings of east Germanness

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<sup>33</sup> The final section of this chapter outlines the ethical considerations for the thesis (p. 138).

are constructed in social situations. Therefore, the participant decided when and where the interview should take place; all twenty were carried out either in the home of the interviewee, at their workplace, or in a café that they chose. This meant the setting had a relaxed atmosphere, and was a location in which the participant felt comfortable and in control. The relaxed nature of the interview process was also conveyed through email correspondence, where 'Du' was used to demonstrate informality, but capitalised to account for unfamiliarity, as is custom in written German. This also reflected some of the linguistic norms in the eastern region, where 'du' is more commonly used than in the west, a convention which has remained from the time of socialism. Additionally, before each interview I chatted casually to the participant about a neutral topic to put them at ease and, before and during the actual interview, used the informal 'du'.

When the interview was designed, it was anticipated to last for approximately one hour, which would be long enough to identify and discuss the key ways that the participant understood east Germanness, but not so long as to dissuade participation or cause the interviewee to become tired or bored during the interview. The importance of maintaining the motivation of the participant is explained further in the section on the final interview. In practice, however, almost all of the interviews lasted for approximately ninety minutes, primarily because the participants were so keen to tell their story and therefore provided longer and more detailed narratives than was anticipated. After obtaining consent from the participant, I recorded each interview, so that it could later be transcribed and analysis could be carried out. Nineteen out of twenty participants agreed to be recorded, and one declined. During the unrecorded interview extensive notes were taken, which included significant or frequently used terminology, and a detailed interview report was written up immediately after the interview. Once the interview had ended, participants were informed that they could contact me using the details on the card they were provided with if they had any questions or concerns. They were also given the sweets, which, as explained below, were used as part of the interview process, as a thank you gift.

## The design of the interview

### *Pilot interviews*

Before designing the final interview for the project, two pilot studies were carried out. The first took place in June 2008 and had five participants and the second in June 2009, with six participants. The participants for the first study consisted of teachers who had started working at the school I had also worked in after I left. The second set of interviews was carried out before the decision had been made not to do a comparative study between Berlin and a more rural town in the east. Therefore, I was put in touch with three of the participants through the first study I had carried out in Berlin, and the other three were contacts that I had made through a friend in Görlitz. The three participants in Berlin were re-interviewed for the final part of the data collection. These studies ensured that the final interview would successfully address the research questions and explore themes that were relevant and important to the way individuals understand their east Germanness. They also flagged up sensitive issues and loaded terminology, which were consequently used carefully in the final interview so as not to pre-empt or skew responses to the questions, or worse, cause offence to the participants.

The first pilot study was formulated alongside the findings of the literature review with the aim of establishing whether the issues linked to east Germanness in existing literature were perceived as relevant or important by easterners themselves. Five key categories emerged from research on the east: identity (how did participants identify themselves), GDR memories (particularly eastern products), generation (relations between older and younger easterners), east-west relations and capitalism. After talking about these five categories, participants were asked if, when it came to their east Germanness, there were any other issues which had not been discussed. The most striking difference between these interview findings and the claims made in existing literature related to GDR memories, or eastern products. Although these are deemed to be an important part of east Germanness in current work in the field, they were quickly

disregarded by the participants as having little importance. Instead, memories of the GDR tended to be more private, focusing on family and childhood. This is not to say, however, that consumption was also dismissed as an important part of east Germanness. Rather, it appeared that attitudes towards consumption and capitalism characterised understandings of east Germanness more than the consumer items that people bought. The participants emphasised that consumers in unified Germany have considerably higher expectations than those in the GDR, and that, as a consequence, there is less social solidarity under capitalism. Questions of identity, east-west relations and generation all remained relevant themes. However, the pilot study revealed that there were more complexities and tensions in the way that they are understood than is often alluded to in existing literature, in that perceptions of these issues shifted depending on the context. Narratives about generational and east-west difference were far more nuanced when the participants discussed people with whom they had personal contact than when they referred to a more generic group.

The second pilot study built upon the findings of the initial study, taking consumption as its central theme. The rationale for this choice was derived from its significance in existing literature on east Germanness and its relevance to identity processes in consumer societies.<sup>34</sup> The importance placed on consumer mentalities and capitalism in the first pilot study also played a key role, not only in the decision to use consumption to examine east Germanness, but also in the way it was used. Rather than focusing on eastern products, the second pilot interview focused on consumer attitudes and views on capitalism. Taking consumption as a key way of articulating identities, as suggested in theoretical literature on identity processes, the interview comprised of questions which encouraged the participants to locate their own consumer attitudes in relation to those of westerners and their parents, both in the GDR and in unified Germany. In short, then, the interview intended to use the participants' narratives on

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<sup>34</sup> For example, Patico and Caldwell (2002) explain why consumption has been a relevant social practice for understanding the transition from socialism to capitalism (see pp. 26-29). The links between consumption and identity processes are explained on pp. 81-87.

consumption as a means to address the themes deemed most significant in the first pilot study. Having acknowledged the broad and variable nature of consumer practices, it was decided that the interview should focus on a specific form of consumption to avoid overlooking or simplifying the complexities of consumer understandings. The mode of consumption selected was gift-giving, or more specifically, special occasions, as they constitute a common social practice to both the GDR and unified Germany, but also a practice in which the exact norms and values are likely to differ greatly between a socialist and capitalist society.<sup>35</sup> The questions enquired about gift-giving at Christmas, for birthdays and for more private occasions, such as giving presents to hosts. Participants were encouraged to compare past practices to present practices, and their own practices with those of others within these themes. After carrying out the interviews it was clear that using gift-giving as a means of exploring east Germanness was effective in a number of ways. First, as anticipated, asking the participants to discuss a social practice which existed in the GDR, but has changed in unified Germany, encouraged them to locate their attitudes between the past and present. Consequently they expressed their views about contemporary Germany and capitalism. Second, it provided a more subtle way of exploring the participants' approaches to the spending of money, eliciting less defensive responses than more direct questioning on the issue would. Third, it encouraged responses about how participants identify themselves and others through the way that they consume, which shed light on generations and east-west relations. The problem with this format was that, although parts of the interview generated rich data in terms of the research objectives, other sections comprised of long passages about traditions for special occasions, which gave no insight into east Germanness and were therefore not directly relevant to the project.

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<sup>35</sup> Pp. 88-92 provide more detail about the benefits of exploring perceptions of gift-giving in the examination of eastern identity processes.

*The final interviews*

The final interviews were carried out in November 2009 and January 2010 with three participants from the second pilot study and seventeen new participants. They resembled the second pilot study in that it took consumption as a means of understanding identity processes. Generally speaking however, the theme of special occasions was significantly reduced and replaced with questions which explored issues of east Germanness more explicitly. The changes ensured that the interview was more directed at relevant themes, but simultaneously maintained flexibility so that its direction could be steered by the participants. The remainder of this section outlines the design of the final interview (see appendices 3 and 4) and explains the rationale behind the design.

The initial questions gathered background information about the participants, asking their age, where they live, their family status and job. These questions were restricted to information that would be important when analysing the interviews. Following the background questions, the interview was formatted to begin with broader themes and to gradually become more explicit about east Germanness. This corresponds to the guidelines set out by Keats, who suggests that 'the topics move from the more general to the more particular, and begin with the least threatening aspects' (2000, p. 49). This format helped to ensure that the interview situation was as 'natural' as possible, as the participants were immediately put at ease by informal questions which avoided any sensitive issues. Furthermore, since the questions focused on broad themes, rather than tackling east Germanness explicitly, they did not risk pre-empting or skewing the subsequent responses of the participants. Using the theme of gift-giving as a starting-point, the initial question asked about memories of *Kindertag* (Children's Day), an important annual occasion in the GDR which involved receiving gifts. Encouraging participants to talk about a GDR tradition set the stage for participants to contextualise their understandings between their GDR past and their present lives in unified Germany. Retaining the theme of children, participants then went on to discuss the attitudes of today's children to gifts in comparison to their own, which opened the way for a broader discussion about

consumer attitudes and capitalist mentalities. The focus here was very much a comparison of the past and present, which shed light on where the respondents located their views on capitalism.

For the following section of the interview participants were asked to fill out a sheet indicating what is important to them when they receive a gift (see appendices 5 and 6). The sheet comprised of gift characteristics (for example, luxurious, expensive, useful) and gift-giving behaviours (such as generosity in terms of time and money), and respondents marked the importance of each characteristic according to a scale. The characteristics were chosen because of the social identity that each represents; for instance, the social image of a person who prioritises luxury is quite different to that of someone who emphasises usefulness.<sup>36</sup> The main objective of this exercise was to hear how the participants rationalised and explained each response in their narrative, rather than to see what they marked on the sheet. This gave insights not only into where they position themselves using these social markers, but how they perceive and position others. A further advantage of this activity was that it added variety to the interview process. Qualitative interviewers acknowledge that the interview process can be tiring for the respondents, and that it is the responsibility of the interviewer to keep the participants interested and motivated. Seymour Sudman and Norman Bradburn (1974) warn that

the primary demand of the respondent's role is that he answers the interviewer's questions. Answering certain questions will require considerable effort on his part. If the respondent is not sufficiently motivated to perform his role, the whole enterprise falls apart (p. 16).

Integrating a variety of activities into the interview process served as a productive strategy to ensure that the participants remained motivated throughout the interview, which ultimately led to richer data for analysis. Other

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<sup>36</sup> The different values tie in with different approaches to gift giving are framed by Beattie et al.'s framework. This differentiates between 'gift selection effort', which focuses on the thought and time which is put into a gift, and the 'amount of giving', which focuses on quantity and economic values. This framework is explained on pp. 89-90.

methods detailed below, such as the section on advertisements and further worksheet-based activities demonstrate how this strategy was maintained throughout the interview.

The theme of gift-giving was continued into the next phase of interview, which asked participants about gifts that they would buy for hosts. The purpose of these questions was twofold: to explore how the respondents understood their own sense of Germanness and if and how they conceptualised east-west differences. Using my own position as a British researcher in Germany, I first asked what sort of gifts participants would give to a host in the UK. As anticipated, the most frequent responses referred to typically German or east German objects, which paved the way for a discussion about attachment to place and identifications with Germany or the east. The following questions also focused on gifts for hosts, but this time for hosts in Hamburg, which is in west Germany, and Leipzig, an east German city. This implicitly encouraged participants to compare the consumer attitudes and expectations of westerners with those of easterners and subsequently shed light on how their social image is perceived.

It was in the following section of the interview that the questions were directed more explicitly at the issues surrounding east Germanness, thus adhering to Keats's suggestion to 'move from the more general to the more particular' when designing interviews. Posing questions on relatively neutral themes until this point ensured that the participants' responses were not pre-empted by issues which are widely considered to characterise east Germanness. Rather, the objective was to question these common assertions and enable the participants' own understandings of east Germanness to emerge in the interview process. Directing the focus midway through the interview, however, ensured that the claims made in existing literature were addressed.



Participants were given four advertisements (see appendices 7 and 8) which had been created by *Fritzsche und Mackat*,<sup>37</sup> a marketing agency which specialises in differentiating advertising campaigns for eastern and western consumers. The company creates an eastern and western advertisement for the same product, and participants were shown the east and west version for two products. The advertisements were selected because the images each of them depicts correspond to eastern and western stereotypes. The western *Miele* advertisement portrays a well-dressed single woman drinking a cocktail in a contemporary kitchen, where, importantly, there is nothing in the oven. The eastern version, on the other hand shows a couple in the same kitchen, which has been decorated with a vase of flowers and where there is a joint of meat roasting in the oven. The campaign was intended to address the supposed gap between the sophisticated and individualistic westerner and the simpler and collectively-minded easterner. The second campaign advertises *Samsung*, and was chosen because of the differences in the slogan. In the western version, it focuses on business and style, typically western characteristics which are mocked in the eastern slogan that implies that a stylish mobile phone will not make you a better person. The second campaign, then, addresses attitudes regarding the importance of image and style in a capitalist society. Initially, participants were not told that the adverts differentiated between eastern and western consumers, but simply asked which they preferred and why, which addressed how the respondent perceived the social images set out in the advertisements. Afterwards, respondents were told about the distinction and asked which they thought had been produced for the east and west. I deliberately referred to the east and west as the new and old *Länder*, which are less loaded terms. Nonetheless, this led on to discussion about east-west relations and the issue of an ongoing distinction between the east and west.

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<sup>37</sup> In 2010 this advertising agency changed its name to *Mackat*. Further information about the agency is provided on their website ([www.mackat.de](http://www.mackat.de)) and in Mackat's marketing study *Das Deutsch-Deutsche Geheimnis* (2007).

After discussing the advertisements the interview continued with the theme of consumer mentalities, focusing on specific behaviours which are said to be approached differently by easterners and westerners. Similarly to the section on attitudes to gifts, participants were asked to mark how frequently they believed they carried out specific consumer practices when it came to purchasing everyday items (see appendices 9 and 10). The sheet comprised of a list of practices, ranging from prioritising price and quality to attitudes to fashion and credit, which had been surveyed quantitatively by the *Institut für Marktforschung Leipzig*, in their study 'Der ostdeutsche Konsument zwischen Anpassung und Verweigerung – von der DDR bis heute' (p. 45). The aim of the study was to investigate east-west consumer differences with the view of contributing to marketing campaigns for the old and new *Länder*. The participants were not informed about the source of the characteristics, as it was important not to lead them into thinking in terms of the east-west distinction. Taking a set of consumer practices that, according to this quantitative study, characterise east Germanness, and exploring them qualitatively first established their relevance in east-west differences, and second, shed light onto how the participants reasoned and understood each practice. The objectives of this activity resembled those for the section on attitudes to gifts, in that it focused on how the participants constructed their explanations for their choices, rather than what they marked on the sheet. Having filled out the sheet according to their perceptions of their own practices, participants were then given two different coloured sets of labels, each containing the same set of consumer practices, and a further sheet with separate columns for the old and new *Länder* (see appendix 11). They were then asked to arrange the labels to according to how frequently they believed eastern and western consumers engaged in the different practices. At this point then, the interview had shifted from enabling the participants to define the other people with whom they made comparisons, then implicitly suggesting the west as an other in the section on gifts for hosts, to explicitly asking the respondents to work within the categories of east and west. This revealed how the participants progressively responded to this categorisation, that is to say whether they

rejected or accepted it and how they constructed it. Once the interviewee had arranged the labels, we discussed the differences between their categorisations and also how their perception of their own practices corresponded to the east-west categories. This shed light on how the participants located themselves in relation to their perceptions of westerners *and* easterners, thus revealing differentiation within understandings of east Germanness.

The final section of the interview was the most explicit, directly tackling the dominant terminology and discourse on east Germanness in the German public sphere. These issues were left to the end because much of the terminology is deemed to be quite provocative and loaded with negative connotations. Therefore, it was important not to mention them earlier in the interview so as not to pre-empt the responses of the participants and also to see if and how they used them in their narratives without prompting. Integrating them into questions towards the end of the interview, however, gave insight into how participants react to and use different labels and interact with dominant discourse. The first question dealt with the terms *Ossi* and *Wessi*, colloquial words referring to easterners and westerners which both conjure up rather negative stereotypes. These terms were not initially part of the final interview design, as their significance was not clear from the pilot studies. They were, however, included after the first two interviews had taken place, where it emerged from the participants that these were important labels in eastern identity processes. The question focused on the situational use of the terms to ascertain how their meanings changed when they were employed by different people and in different social circumstances.

Participants were then presented with two packets of sweets: *Knusperflocken*, a traditional GDR product that is still available in unified Germany, and *Ampelmännchen*, a product which did not exist in the GDR, but has been created since unification and consists of sweets in the shape of the GDR pedestrian crossing figure.<sup>38</sup> The sweets were selected because of this distinction and their

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<sup>38</sup> During the GDR the *Ampelmännchen* existed as a depoliticised figure – the participants would have become familiar with it in their school lessons about road safety. It was only after

subsequent different symbolic meaning. Both come under the bracket of eastern products, which contribute significantly to discourse on *Ostalgie*, yet their contextual difference is often overlooked. In order to explore how participants understand their east Germanness in unified Germany, it was important to select a product which was part of their lives in the GDR as well as one which, despite only being introduced after unification, has become a cult symbol of east Germanness. Initially, participants were asked generic questions about the products to find out whether they felt any attachment to them, the form that this attachment took, and how they distinguished between a highly marketed post-unification symbol of east Germanness and an everyday product from the GDR era. This usually led naturally to discussion about *Ostalgie*, but in the cases where this did not occur, participants were asked to describe *Ostalgie*, which opened the way for further dialogue about the theme. The chapter exploring the findings on perceptions of *Ostalgie* explain when and by whom the term was introduced into each of the interviews. Finally, respondents were explicitly asked if *Ostalgie* corresponded to their own feelings, which revealed the differences between the ways they use the term in their narratives and how they identify with it when asked more directly. Furthermore, for those who did not identify with *Ostalgie*, it provided an opportunity to talk about understandings of east Germanness which do not correspond with the dominant discourse.

### Data analysis

The analytical methods for this project were designed to fulfil the research objectives of gaining an in-depth understanding of the complexities and ambiguities of east German identity processes. Discourse analysis emerged as an

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unification, when plans to replace the *Ampelmännchen* with the west German equivalent began to be implemented, that the figure gained more prominence. This triggered the formation of the 'Kommittee zur Rettung der Ampelmännchen' (Committee to save the *Ampelmännchen*) in the mid-1990s, which succeeded in ensuring that the *Ampelmännchen* remained as a road safety signal. The figure has since become 'the single most recognizable icon of GDR culture' and holds strong links with the often contested idea of *Ostalgie* (Enns, 2007, p. 478).

appropriate choice because, as Nelson Phillips points out in his work on the analytical framework, it lends itself to the study of 'identity – not a traditional view of identity as a stable, essential characteristic, but, rather, a fragmented, fluid and ambiguous identity that changes over time' (2002, p. 41). Therefore, discourse analysis corresponds to the methods chosen for the thesis, which emphasises the constructed and changeable nature of identities as a starting point for understanding how identities are negotiated and articulated. Phillips explains how discourse analysis facilitates the exploration of these complex processes, claiming that 'the things that make up our social world – including our very identities – appear out of discourse. To put it another way, our talk, and what we are, are one and the same' (2002, p. 2). Analysing the content and construction of texts and discourse, therefore, sheds light on how individuals perceive themselves and the composition of these self-perceptions. This section first explains the analytical method for this project in more detail, drawing on critical discourse analysis and critical linguistic analysis to create a model which fulfils the requirements of the research questions. It then turns to the issue of interpretation, outlining the limitations of the project given that the findings are based on the individual interpretations of the researcher and the participant and explaining the methods which are used to overcome and work with this subjectivity. The following part looks at the ambiguities which inevitably emerge from this form of in-depth research, outlining the methods employed to both engage with these complexities and use them to formulate consistent analysis. Finally, it explains how the data for this project was analysed, and how this process ensured that the project was reliable and valid.

The exact techniques used to analyse the interview data were designed to address the interplay between social interaction between individuals and resonant popular discourses, thus ensuring they combined postmodernist and symbolic interactionist schools of thought, as outlined in the first section of this chapter. Generally speaking, discourse analysis does account for these different types of discourse through its focus on local context, that is to say the circumstances in which the data gathering is taking place, and its consideration of broader

discourse on the matter being studied. In his work on national identities, Daniel Schneider explains that

discourse analysis is the method which has been specifically developed to grasp the *situational* aspects of speech in specific moments in time at specific locations *and* the underlying references to the wider discursive setting (2010, p. 1).

His reference to 'situational aspects of speech' as well as to a 'wider discursive setting' demonstrates that the method incorporates both of these factors. The question is however, to what extent do different techniques within the bracket of discourse analysis account for these different types of discourse? Phillips divides the field of discourse analysis into two, identifying a critical strand, which focuses primarily on the power dynamics of meta-narratives, and a constructivist strand, which looks more closely at everyday interaction and processes of social construction. He goes on to suggest, however, that a 'three-dimensional' approach, combining both strands, constitutes the most productive and fruitful method:

It connects texts to discourses, locating them in a historical and social context, by which we refer to the particular actors, relationships, and practices that characterize the situation under study (2002, p. 4).

This three-dimensional approach was applied to this project, as it accounts for and explores the influence of wider discourse in how individuals construct their identities on a daily basis through social interaction. It enables the analysis of how individuals respond to and use popular perceptions of the east relating to *Ostalgie* and consumption in their day-to-day understandings of themselves, those around them, and people with whom they have no personal contact. Examining how easterners conceptualise their own sense of east Germanness, that of friends and family, and a broader sense of east Germanness demonstrated how much agency individuals have over different perceptions, and how the meanings and relevance of different popular perceptions alter when they are discussing different 'others'. The same exploratory processes are carried out to

gain insights into west Germanness; differentiating between westerners with whom the participants experience daily interaction and a more generic conception of west Germanness reveals how and when individuals shape or are shaped by discourse in their understandings.

In order to create a three-dimensional model, two techniques have been selected from the framework of discourse analysis: critical discourse analysis and critical linguistic analysis. Phillips explains that critical discourse analysis is

helpful in revealing the way in which discursive activities help to construct institutions in which power is embedded through the way in which taken-for-granted understandings serve to privilege some actors and disadvantage others (2002, p. 27).

The use of this method explores where and when 'taken-for-granted understandings' play a role in conceptions of east and west Germanness, looking at shifts in the influences of resonant discourses over individuals' conceptions in different situations. In terms of the interview material, the technique is employed to analyse the resonance of popular perceptions in the way that the participants understand themselves, those with whom they have social interaction and those that they have never met. This sheds light on the influence of discourse over their different conceptions, and also if and when the discourse is challenged or reinforced. Phillips goes on to explain critical linguistic analysis, claiming that 'it shares the concerns of critical discourse analysis but focuses more closely on the microdynamics of texts' (ibid). This mode of analysis, then, involves identifying the linguistic strategies employed by the participants in their texts and thus serves to highlight how discourse is both used and manipulated. Deconstructing the language and strategies the participants use to position themselves and others in relation to the discourse reveals *how* the power dynamics shift in different social situations.

Before explaining the analytical process for this project in more detail, it is important to highlight some characteristics of discourse analysis which need to be taken into account for the study to be reliable and valid. The first is the matter

of subjective interpretation, which refers to the interpretation of the researcher as well as that of the participants. In his work on research interviews, Brenner describes the material as

pictures that are “blurred” by the “gatekeeping” and distorting influences of informants’ cognitions of their experience, which are further modified by the effects of interviewer-respondent interaction within the totality of the interview situation (1985, p. 154).

Interview findings have been subject to individual interpretation at two stages of the research process; first, during the interview where the participant understands the question in line with his or her own preconceptions and responds accordingly, and, second, during the analytical process where the researcher reads the material within his or her own frame of reference. These characteristics are widely accepted as an inevitable part of a research approach that involves a social actor (the researcher) using his or her own social experiences to explore the social world and acknowledged as a distinguishing feature of the study. Keats cites Deborah Lupton to explain that ‘proponents of discourse analysis make no claims as to the objectivity or universal truth of their insights’ (2000, p. 80). Nevertheless, in order to validate the study it is important that the researcher acknowledges factors which may influence the findings and carries out techniques to ensure the processes of data analysis are as consistent as possible.

The researcher should take a reflexive approach, which involves recognising his or her preconceptions and the way that these may affect each stage of the project, from the research design to the data gathering and analysis phases. Furthermore, the researcher should acknowledge his or her potential influence openly so that those reading the project are aware of its limitations. Phillips points out that this technique is fundamental to studies incorporating discourse analysis:

It [discourse analysis] also includes the academic project itself within its analysis; with its emphasis on reflexivity, discourse analysis aims to remind readers that in using language, producing texts, and drawing on discourses,



researchers and the research community are part and parcel of the constructive effects of discourse (2002, p. 2).

In work on popular discourse and individual narratives, the researcher should explicitly account for their influential role in how the participant constructs his or her own narrative, as well as the fact that they have also been shaped by the discourse that surrounds them.<sup>39</sup>

The subjectivity of the participants' interpretations became clear during the analytical stage of the research, where ambiguities, complexities and differing perceptions emerged as a reflection of how different social experiences have influenced each participant. For example, participants with children tended to have very different perceptions of raising children in a capitalist society than those who do not have children of their own. Those with children emphasised that it is difficult to bring children up as modest consumers, while those without were confident that their own children would be modest consumers. These ambiguities are, however, an important part of the findings – their existence illustrates that the project has successfully engaged with the complexities of social understandings and identity processes. Potter warns about the shortcomings of unvarying research findings:

We have come to regard interviews that contain an internally consistent set of responses as uninformative because such interviews tell us little about the full range of interpretive practices that participants use to construct social meanings (1985, p. 266).

The inconsistencies within interview findings should not, therefore, be overlooked; however, it is necessary for the researcher to make sense of the ambiguities in order to draw coherent conclusions from the study. The strategies used to meet this requirement in this project are explained below.

The first phase of analysis took place during the data collection for this study in the form of a fieldwork diary. This was completed soon after each interview had been carried out and was intended to log information that would not have been

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<sup>39</sup> My own role in this process, including how my understandings of east Germanness have been shaped, is explained on pp. 105-109.

recorded on the Dictaphone, such as impressions about how the participant had responded to the interview, themes which seemed to hold particular importance and general sentiments about the interview process. These diary entries recorded, for example, if the participant had been distracted at any points during the interview, which sometimes happened when interviews were carried out in the participants' home with their children. Instances when the participants became defensive, or were particularly animated, were also documented here. Noting these points in the diary ensured that they would be incorporated into later analysis, and that significant themes or behaviours would not be forgotten between the data collection and the subsequent stages of analysis, which took place after all of the data had been collected. The next stage involved transcribing the recordings of the interviews. Care was taken to ensure the transcriptions were detailed and included pauses, intonation and changes in the volume of the participant's voice. Once each transcription was complete, a transcription report was written, which incorporated the main themes to have emerged from the interview according to the interview recording and the fieldwork diary. This served as a form of vertical analysis, that is to say it looked at the interviews on a case by case basis, addressing any discrepancies or irregularities within each interview. Brenner stresses the importance of such a strategy, which he calls the 'test-retest approach', in ensuring the reliability of the project: 'The interview, as regards to many questions, is conducted twice, and by comparing the material, the internal inconsistency (or stability) of the accounts can be checked' (1985, p. 161). Verifying the 'internal consistency' of each interview, then, serves as the first step in clarifying the ambiguities and complexities in the participant's subjective interpretation of the interview.

Having completed the transcriptions and transcription reports, analysis moved on to the coding stage. First, the transcription reports were used horizontally, so the data was examined to identify the main themes from all of the interviews. This process revealed a large number of themes, which were then grouped together into broader categories and used to carry out the first phase of coding. The broader codes served to break the interview material down into more

manageable groups of data, so that the patterns and complexities within each category could be seen more clearly than would have been possible if the whole body of material was analysed at the same time. Each data group was then re-examined to identify the sub-themes within it and recoded accordingly, which resulted in six overarching categories, within which there were twenty sub-coded groups.

The next step in the analytical process was to assess the themes within each coded group for their frequency and relevance in order to make sense of the range of subjective interpretations that the different participants expressed during the interviews. Potter explains how the use of this technique adds to the reliability of the data:

each specific passage is compared with each other passage in relation to a given topic in order to eliminate certain responses as unreliable, to furnish reinterpretations of problematic responses, and to judge what is the best overall interpretation (1985, pp. 248-249).

Identifying 'the best overall interpretation' not only gave weight to the findings, but also made them more consistent, thus facilitating the formulation of coherent and valid conclusions. The coded data was then used as a starting point for structuring the conclusive chapters of the thesis. Comparing the dominant themes of the interviews to the existing literature on east Germanness that had been analysed for the literature review revealed which of the findings made a new and original contribution to the field or shed further insight on claims made by other scholars. As anticipated, these themes largely corresponded to the research questions for the project, which had been formulated according to gaps identified in the existing literature. Returning to the literature review after analysing the data, however, demonstrated exactly how the findings of the interviews built upon existing research, as well as how new and unexpected themes fitted into the field. Although this approach made for some important conclusions, I realised that I was engaging too heavily with the existing literature in order to structure the findings of the study. In short, the most prevalent ideas

in the field were determining the structure of the thesis to such an extent, that I risked overlooking the participants' perceptions of east Germanness which did not correspond to existing findings. I therefore returned to the codes that had emerged from the interview transcripts and remapped the thesis according to them. This ensured that the findings of the interviews, rather than echoing the resonant ideas in existing research, dictated the structure of the thesis. This proved to be a successful approach, as once I began writing up the findings it became clear that I was able to contribute to existing ideas, as well as to introduce new findings about east Germanness into the field.

### **Ethical considerations**

The ethical guidelines for this project were formulated according to the results of a meeting with the ethical advisor in the ESML (POLIS since 2011) Department at the University of Bath. Before the interview began, participants were assured that the interview was confidential and anonymous. In line with this, pseudonyms have been used to refer to the participants throughout this thesis. They were told that, if they wished to withdraw their contribution to the project, they could contact me at any time to do so and also asked if they wished to have be sent the results of the study. Initially, all participants expressed an interest in reading the finished thesis, although this offer was generally declined once the participants realised it would be written in English. Additionally, participants were asked for permission to record the interview. As noted above, once the interview had been completed, each participant was given a number of 'business cards' containing my contact details. This fulfilled two purposes: first, helping to expand the sample size and, second, ensuring that the interviewees were able to contact me after the interview.

### **Summary**

The qualitative design of this methodological framework corresponds to the research aims of the project by addressing the complex relationship between

individuals, others and broader discourses in the construction of east German understandings. As an interpretive small-scale and in-depth study, it engages with the fluidity, instability and wide range of variables which are at the core of identity processes. Combining the symbolic interactionist and postmodernist schools of thought is an important feature of the framework, as it facilitates the exploration of the power dynamics between meta-narratives, namely *Ostalgie* and those relating to consumption, and identity processes. This approach was implemented in each stage of the research to reveal how the power that popular perceptions has over individuals' understandings shifts in different social settings. In turn, it showed the processes by which the participants respond to and interact with the discourses. The participants were not explicitly faced with these popular perceptions of the east until the final stages of the interview. This meant that the majority of their responses were not affected by my mention of loaded and polemical terms, and that the ways they engage with the perceptions in their everyday understandings were able to emerge naturally. Additionally, throughout the interviews participants were implicitly encouraged to make comparisons between themselves, other people with whom they have personal contact and a more generic group whom they had never met, which demonstrated the role played by popular perceptions in different forms of social interaction. During the analytical process, a combination of critical discourse analysis and critical linguistic analysis was used to highlight where and when the power dynamics between individuals and narratives change, and how individuals use language to interact with the narratives at different times.

In terms of validity, practising reflexivity throughout this project has not only enabled me to openly acknowledge how my own social experiences and characteristics have influenced the study, but also to forge strategies to overcome some of its potential limitations. Given that the primary objective of the thesis is to gain insights into how individuals understand their east Germanness in everyday social settings, it was crucial that I recognised how my own characteristics, such as my nationality and social status, are likely to have affected the responses of the participants. Ensuring the validity of the project also

required that I acknowledged my own frames of reference, particularly during the stages of research design and data analysis. This enabled me to challenge my own preconceptions, a process which was facilitated by the supervision of the project, where my work was examined by other people who were more likely to observe any assumptions being made.

Semi-structured interviews were selected as an appropriate method for data collection, as they grant the participant with relative freedom to steer the direction of the interview, but also consist of a fixed set of questions or themes, which ensures consistency throughout the interviews. Great care was taken to enable the participant's conceptions of east Germanness to emerge as 'natural' a setting as possible, thus ensuring the fulfilment of the research objectives and producing valid findings. It was, however, important that a balance was struck between the freedom of the interviewee and the input of the interviewer so that all of the interviews covered a standard set of central themes, which made for more coherent and reliable findings. The validity of the data collection was strengthened by the two pilot studies carried out before the final interviews, as these ensured that the final interview successfully addressed the research questions and did not pre-empt or skew the final set of data. The questions for the interviews were formulated to be nondirective, so that they did not bias the participants' responses, but enabled their own understandings to emerge. The interview was also structured to begin with broader themes and become steadily more explicit and focused. Starting with the discussion of more general topics put the participants at ease, which contributed to the 'natural' setting for the interview. This approach also allowed the understandings of the participants, and in particular the way that they used the discourse in their conceptions, to emerge more 'naturally', which would not have been possible if the interviewees had been directly faced with the discourse from the outset.

The analytical methods for the project took a three-dimensional approach, drawing from critical discourse analysis and critical linguistic analysis. This corresponded to the need for the project to address how the power of discourse shifts in different social settings and the strategies that individuals use to engage

or work with the discourse. Reflexivity continued to be practised during the analytical stage to ensure that the effects of my own subjective interpretations in constructing the findings were openly acknowledged. Keeping a fieldwork diary, which was completed shortly after each interview had taken place, proved to be an invaluable reflexive tool, as it enabled me to incorporate my initial perceptions about each interview, the responses of the participants and my own role as an interviewer into the analysis of the transcriptions. In order to ensure the reliability of the interviews and their analysis, the material was assessed at various points to identify the dominant and most consistent themes. After each interview had been transcribed, a transcription report was written which incorporated the findings of the interview and the observations from the fieldwork diary. The reports served to check the interviews on a case-by-case basis for internal consistency. Once transcription of all of the interviews was completed, they were looked at horizontally to establish which themes constituted the most frequent and relevant, and therefore presented themselves as the most representative overall interpretation. This process added to the reliability of the project, as it ensured that the conclusions drawn from the findings were based on the most consistent and significant themes to have emerged from the interviews. Before structuring the conclusive chapters for the thesis, the interview findings were compared to the conclusions in existing literature in the field. This enhanced the validity of the thesis by fulfilling the aim of contributing new findings to fill gaps in current research and giving more in-depth insights into the complexities behind claims already made by scholars in the field.

## Chapter Four

### East is east and west is west? Perceptions of east-west difference

The perception that there continues to be a distinction between the east and west in unified Germany has been a key theme to this project from the early stages of research. Reviewing existing literature demonstrated that the social categories of east and west are considered to act as a basis for eastern identity processes.<sup>40</sup> The interviews were therefore designed to explore how the participants perceive the idea of east-west difference, and whether they work within this framework to make current social categorisations. The findings of the interviews did indeed lend weight to the argument that east Germanness is framed by the idea of an east-west distinction. However, the participants' conceptions of east and west were not as straightforward and coherent as suggested in existing literature. Their narratives combined the clear-cut idea that the east and west exist as distinctive groups with their personal experiences of the categories as differentiated groups.

During the design of the interviews, then, it was a priority to engage with how the participants understood the categories of east and west. It was also important to address the assumption that these categories act as key points of reference in eastern identity processes. Therefore, the interview consisted of four phases, each one exploring the issue of east and west more explicitly. The initial phases were designed to find out *if* the participants used the categories at all to locate themselves without my prompting, and the later phases to explore their

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<sup>40</sup> All existing research into east Germanness is framed by the idea of an east-west distinction. That is to say, eastern identities are considered to be distinctive because they differ from west Germanness, as outlined on pp. 25-26. Some scholars look more explicitly at this idea through research into the *Mauer im Kopf*, or the wall in the head, which is said to be a problematic gap which continues to separate the east and west, as shown on pp. 32-34. The east-west distinction is also important to the concepts of the *zweite-Klasse-Mentalität* and the *Trotzidentität*, which suggest that east Germanness is characterised by sentiments of inferiority in response to the west. These concepts are outlined on 34-36.



perceptions of the categorisation of east and west as polar opposites more explicitly.

The culmination of these four phases shed light on the participants' 'implicit' and 'explicit' uses of the east-west categories. In this chapter, the term 'implicit' refers to the 'organic' uses of the markers as points of reference in their narratives, so if and how they relate to east and west to locate themselves without my prompting. It is also used with regard to extracts where the participant was aware that I was interested in hearing about their views on easterners and westerners, but had not been asked to talk specifically about the groupings. 'Explicit' uses describes how the participants position themselves in relation to the labels when they have been specifically asked to work with the categories. In addition, it refers to the ways that they overtly discuss the ongoing distinction made between the east and west in unified Germany.

This chapter is made up of two main sections: first the implicit, and second the explicit understandings of east and west. Analysing the findings of the interviews within these two brackets enables a comparison between how the participants implicitly use the distinction as a point of reference or to explain the social behaviour of others, and how they respond when asked explicitly to work within the categorisations. This comparison revealed a number of tensions between implicit and explicit uses and understandings. Although the participants implicitly relied on the categories frequently during the interview, the majority then went on to distance themselves from, and even criticise the ongoing differentiation between the old and new *Länder*. This demonstrates that the participants' perceptions of east and west are generally more complex and differentiated than suggested in existing literature. Such a broad distinction between east and west does not correspond to their personal experiences, and the participants convey this well in their more reflective narratives. However, the dominance of the east-west distinction in less reflective, more intuitive discussions emphasises that it is highly influential over the participants' implicit perceptions. The simplistic groupings do not accurately reflect the complex and

differentiated way in which they understand others, yet, at times, it still resonates in their narratives.

### **Implicit understandings of east and west**

This section explores how the participants used the east-west categories in the initial phase of the interview, which sought to find out whether the participants used the categories as points of reference without my prompting. After outlining the methodological design of this phase, the section moves on to explore the interviews' findings. According to these, the participants are divided into two groups. The first consists of fifteen participants, so the vast majority of the interviewees, and is characterised by the fact that they made no direct reference to east and west when they discursively positioned themselves within social categories. As is explained below, this group instead tended to identify with others from a similar economic background. The second group consisted of five people, so a quarter of the participants. Unlike those from the first group, they drew directly on east and west to position themselves. Nevertheless, the relevant section below demonstrates that the way these participants implicitly conceptualised east and west does not entirely correspond with the straightforward groupings outlined in existing research. In line with existing literature, they implicitly used the categories as points of reference and, in terms of broad categorisation, had a specific idea of the characteristics held by each group. However, when talking about people with whom they had personal contact, their conceptions became increasingly complex, taking into account sameness as well as difference. Also striking about the second group of participants is that, as their narratives became more reflective, their perceptions of the east and west moved away from the idea of two distinct and homogenous groups. Initially, they did indeed draw from the broad stereotype that the east and west act as converse social groups.<sup>41</sup> However, when encouraged to think

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<sup>41</sup> The east-west 'stereotype' or 'cliché' serve as key terms throughout the chapter. These refer to the perception that the east and west are two reasonably coherent groups which act as polar opposites in unified Germany.

about this intuitive perception and verbalise the differences, the interviewees tended to backtrack from such clear-cut groupings and discuss the differentiated nature of each group.

The final part of this section focuses on how the participants implicitly use the east-west stereotype to affirm or explain their social perceptions about others. Here, the chapter moves away from the groupings made in relation to the first phase of the interview, and instead looks at all of the participants and their implicit uses of east and west in later phases. This analysis shows that, although only a quarter of the participants used east and west to position themselves, the majority of the interviewees draw on the stereotype to understand the behaviour of those around them.

#### 'Organic' uses of east and west

The first phase of the interview consisted of broad questions about gift-giving and consumer attitudes, where participants were asked to talk about how they perceived themselves, and then how they viewed others. This encouraged the participants to position themselves in relation to other social groups in Germany, but, as I did not raise any specific social categories, ensured that they defined the groups according to which they located themselves. At this stage of the interview then, any conceptualisation of east and west was made 'organically', that is to say by the participant without my prompting. It is perhaps worth noting that before agreeing to participate in the project, the interviewees were informed that it focused on gift-giving attitudes within the new *Länder*. As east and west are so frequently presented as polar opposites in the public sphere, the knowledge that the study was only to be carried out in east Germany may well have increased the likelihood of the participants using these categories as points of reference. Nevertheless, having taken this factor into account during analysis, this section of the interview proved helpful in revealing how the participants implicitly use the categories of east and west as points of reference in their narratives.

*Group one: Positioning of the self without east-west reference*

Without exception, this group characterised themselves as relatively modest consumers who, in terms of gift-giving, place more importance on the thought that the gift-giver has put into the gift rather than the object itself.<sup>42</sup> The way that this group positioned itself in relation to others was based primarily on economic circumstances and upbringing. These participants claimed that people who, like them, grew up in a family where money was limited, would share the same consumer modesty and therefore appreciate the economic and sentimental value of what they have. Those who experience more wealth as children, on the other hand, have higher expectations as consumers and place more importance on economic value. The following extract, taken from Claudia's interview, is typical of this first group of participants, and demonstrates how economic circumstances were used as a guide to position the self in relation to others:

Wie du aufgewachsen bist, wie du erzogen wirst. Also...wenn du immer große Geschenke bekommst, die viel Geld kosten, bist du dann irgendwann gewöhnt, dann reicht dir nicht irgendwann eine selbstgebastelte oder -getöpferte Blumenvase, wo sich derjenige vielleicht sehr viel Mühe gegeben hat, aber das ist für dich halt, das ist kein Luxus. Und ich denke mal, es [...] hängt mit der Kindheit zusammen, wie du aufgewachsen bist...bist du in normalen Verhältnissen aufgewachsen oder bist du so halt mit Reichtum aufgewachsen, wo Geld keine Rolle spielt.

(How you grew up, how you were brought up. I mean...if you always get big presents that cost a lot of money, then at some point you get used to it and a homemade or handmade vase isn't enough for you, although the person perhaps put a lot of effort into it, for you it's, it's not a luxury. And I think it's [...] linked to childhood, how you grew up...did you grow up in normal circumstances or did you have a wealthy upbringing, where money was not an issue.)

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<sup>42</sup> These perceptions fit into Beattie et al.'s gift-giving framework which was outlined on pp. 89-90 in the second chapter. They distinguish between 'gift selection effort', which prioritises thought and time spent in gift-giving, and 'amount of giving', which places importance on the expense and quantity of gifts. In terms of popular perceptions of the east and west, 'gift selection effort' corresponds more to images of the east and 'amount of giving' more to perceptions of the west. Therefore, the participants' self-perceptions as gift-givers who prioritise spending time to think about and choose a gift over economic value fit in with popular perceptions of eastern consumers.

Importantly, Claudia makes no direct reference to east and west in the way she discursively positions herself. On the forefront, then, the findings from this group suggest that the labels do not play as key a role in east German identity processes as suggested in some existing literature. However, looking at the way that the same participants characterise the west in other parts of the interview reveals that this reading of the findings is too simplistic. The participants do indeed consistently draw on economic circumstances as an alternative social marker and, in their more reflective discussions, assert that there are people from a range of economic backgrounds in both the east and the west. However, in broader categorisation tasks, westerners are frequently perceived to be more affluent and thus less modest consumers. Therefore, although these participants do not make direct reference to the categories of east and west in this phase of the interview, they do draw on social characteristics which are popularly linked to east and west Germanness.

*Group two: Positioning of the self with east-west reference*

The second group of participants can be compared to the previous group in that they also define themselves as relatively modest and appreciative consumers. However, they made direct reference to east and west to position themselves in the first phase of the interview. The way they constructed their narratives, however, is not entirely reflective of the polarised ways that the two groups are presented in existing literature, as can be seen from the below extracts:

Viel zu viel. Also wir versuchen momentan, meine Frau auch, zusammen, die ist Westberlinerin, versuchen wir das einzudämmen.

(Much too much. I mean, at the moment we're trying, my wife as well, she comes from west Berlin, we're trying to restrict it.)

In this account, which is taken from Max's interview, he is referring to his young son's consumption and the efforts that he and his wife are making to ensure that he does not take consumer goods for granted. Most notable is that, without my

prompting, he feels it necessary to explain that his wife comes from the west, suggesting he does implicitly differentiate between the two groups. This lends weight to the argument that the two labels constitute deep-rooted and polarised points of reference in contemporary Germany. The way that Max structures this anecdote implies that he and his wife may be expected to take opposing approaches to childrearing when it comes to consumption because one of them grew up in the east and the other in the west. However, what he is asserting here is not difference, but sameness. Although he is aware of the east-west distinction, he is rejecting it in his narrative by positioning himself and his wife within the same bracket.

The tendency to implicitly use east and west as distinctive points of reference, while at the same time rejecting the differences, was not restricted to Max, but in fact was common to this second group. Sonja, for example, stated:

Und ja, also ich denke, ich bin noch ziemlich auf dem Teppich geblieben, weil ich es anders kenne und zum Glück auch einen Partner gefunden habe, der trotz der Tatsache, dass er im Westen groß geworden ist, auch kein Konsummensch ist.

(And yeah, I mean I think I've remained quite grounded because I know it can be different and luckily have also found a partner who, despite the fact that he grew up in the west, isn't materialistic either.)

From the structure of her narrative, Sonja appears to perceive her husband as an exception from the norm. She claims that, like her, he is not materialistic, *despite the fact* that he comes from the west. She too, therefore, implicitly uses the east and west as distinctive points of reference. Furthermore, that she portrays her husband as an exception signifies that she has specific expectations about the characteristics that the members of each group holds. Therefore, for this second group, the claim in existing literature that the east and west act as overarching frames of reference in eastern identity processes is supported by the findings of the interviews. These individuals do indeed work within them to position themselves and others and, in terms of broad categorisations, also have a specific idea about how the members of each group can be recognised. However, it seems

that, when looking at the way that the participants characterise easterners whom they know, the categories are more ambiguous than other research suggests. The east and west are not perceived as polar opposites, but categories which overlap as well as differ.

As well as referring to the categories of east and west in their narratives about sameness, the participants in the second group used the categories in the more conventional sense, in that they drew on them to explain difference. This finding corresponds more closely to existing literature, in which the east and west are presented as polar opposites. Once again, however, the participants' narratives were not entirely true to the claims made in existing research. While they initially framed their perceptions according to the east-west categories, their conceptualisations increased in complexity as they became more reflective:

Und da ist mein Freund noch, glaube ich, der Materialistischste unter allen, aber wie gesagt, der ist aus der BRD. Aber so sind auch nicht alle, das kann ich auch nicht sagen. Also ich habe auch Freunde aus den alten Bundesländern, die, denke ich, auch so ungefähr in der Art denken.

(And there I think my boyfriend is still the most materialistic out of all of them, but like I said, he comes from the FRG. But not everyone's like that, I can't say that either. I mean, I also have friends from the old *Länder*, who, I think, also think more or less in that way.)

Like the other participants in this group, Elisabeth also implicitly uses east and west as distinctive points of reference. Yet, unlike the other interviewees cited here, she does not place herself and her west German boyfriend in the same bracket. Instead she uses the perception that easterners and westerners approach consumption differently to explain the differences between herself and her boyfriend, so to make sense of those around her.

What is most relevant here, however, is how her narrative develops once she has positioned herself and her boyfriend according to the broad categories of east and west. She gradually moves away from such straightforward categorisation, emphasising that neither group should be taken as homogenous. Her use of the phrase 'I can't say that either' suggests that, after drawing on the broad social

categories, she feels the need to correct herself. She is aware that such an assertion does not actually correspond to her perceptions.

Elisabeth was not alone in articulating sweeping statements about the east and west, before realising that such generalisations mismatched the way that they perceived those around them. The following extract is taken from Sonja's interview, the same participant who explained her husband's lack of interest in materialism as an exception from the west German norm:

Nee, typisch...also wenn schon typisch, dann eher typisch ostdeutsch als westdeutsch vielleicht. [...] Hmmm...das ist schwer zu beantworten. Also ich kenne solche und solche und vielleicht kann man doch nicht sagen, dass es typisch ostdeutsch ist. Also es gibt auch Westdeutsche, die sich viel Gedanken machen, was die schenken, und die auch nicht finden, dass es immer ein luxuriöses Geschenk sein muss, ja. Also nee, ich glaube, das ist sehr, ja, das ist individuell, hängt vom Typ Mensch ab.

(No, typically...I mean if it is typical, then it's more typical east German than west German perhaps. [...] Hmmm...that is difficult to answer. I mean, I know all sorts and perhaps you can't say after all that it's typically east German. I mean, there are also west Germans who put a lot of thought into what they give as a gift and who also don't think that a gift has to be expensive, yeah. So, no, I think it's very, yeah, it's individual, depends on the type of person.)

In this part of the interview, I asked Sonja whether she believes her attitudes to gifts are typical. Without my prompting, she responds that they can be characterised as east German rather than west German. However, when I go on to ask how these two categories differ, she struggles to answer and begins to backtrack from such a sweeping generalisation. My request for her to elaborate on her response appears to have encouraged her to think about people she knows to exemplify her answer. After doing this, she realises that the east-west categorisation is too clear-cut and fails to account for the differentiation among the group. That these participants' initial responses abstractedly draw on such broad and homogenous categories demonstrates the influence that sweeping generalisations about the east and west as polar opposites have over identity



processes. It is only when the participants in this group are encouraged to be more reflective that they challenge such a broad categorisation.

Also striking about the above extract is that Sonja appears to have an intuitive understanding of what it is to be an easterner or a westerner. She initially seems quite sure that her own attitudes are typically east German, but when asked to clarify the differences, finds it difficult to pin them down. This, again, was a common tendency among the second group of participants. When talking about her attitude to gifts, for example, Eva claimed: 'das ist vielleicht typisch für jemanden aus dem Osten' (that's maybe typical for someone from the east). I then went on to ask if a westerner would have different attitudes, and she stated, 'ja, aber ich kann nicht erklären warum' (yes, but I can't explain why).

The second group of participants, then, appear to have quite fixed, and at times intuitive conceptions of what it is to be eastern or western. They are not always able to pin down specific characteristics, but do point out behaviours which they consider to be an exception from the east or west German norm. It is only when they are challenged and then begin to think more reflectively that they express doubts about their initial claims and acknowledge differentiation within the groups. This suggests that, as much existing research suggests, the two categories are deeply ingrained into perceptions in unified Germany. Although the groupings do not match up to their personal experiences and are rejected by the participants once they think more reflectively, they serve as an instinctive mode of categorisation for this group.

#### The use of the east-west stereotype to explain others

At some point in the interview, *all* of the participants drew on the east-west distinction and the characteristics that are associated with each label to explain the behaviours of others. This finding perhaps demonstrates the influence of the distinction the most clearly because it was common to all twenty of the participants. It is analysed in a separate section first because there was no distinction between the participants, and second because it sheds light on how

the participants made sense of others, rather than themselves. Also important is that this finding emerged from the second and third phases of the interviews. These phases were not intended to reveal the participants' 'organic' perceptions, but implicitly encouraged them to consider the categories.

In the second phase of the interview, participants were asked about the type of gift they would take to thank a host in the UK, then in Hamburg, so in the west, and finally in Leipzig, so in the east. This structure effectively revealed if the participants' perceptions of consumer attitudes differentiated between the east and west. The names of towns in the old and new *Länder* were used in favour of the terms 'east' and 'west', as these hold more stereotypical connotations which may have influenced the participants' responses. Furthermore, this phase of the interview was separated into three questions (one for each place), which meant that participants were not asked to directly compare regions in the old and new *Länder*. This approach thus avoided carrying the assumption that there are differences between the east and west, and instead encouraged the interviewees to talk about the two regions from the same perspective but in two separate stages.

During the third phase of the interview, the participants were given a set of advertisements from two companies, each set comprising of one advertisement for the eastern population and one for the western population.<sup>43</sup> They were not told immediately that the advertisements were designed differently for the east and west. I gave the participants this information after we had discussed the advertisements that they preferred and why. In terms of exploring east and west categorisation, this phase of the interview provided insights into how the

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<sup>43</sup> The advertisements were produced by *Fritzsch und Mackat* (now *Mackat*), an agency which specialises in differentiating advertising campaigns for the old and new *Länder*. The advertisements used in the interviews (see appendices 7 and 8) were chosen because the images they represent correspond to popular perceptions of the east and west. The western advertisements portray wealth, sophistication, style and individualism, while the eastern ones depict modesty and homeliness and mock the typically western idea that image and style make you a better person. A full explanation of the advertisements can be found on p. 127.

participants discussed the differentiation when they were confronted more directly with it.

Therefore, it is important to note that at this point in the interview, the east-west labels had been brought into discussion, and so were more likely to be used by the interviewees. Nevertheless, while the use of the terms in this section should not be considered 'organic', it is appropriate to continue to label them implicit or unconscious. This is because the participants had not been asked specifically to work within the categories. Although at this point they were aware that I had an interest in their perceptions of the east-west distinction, and so were more likely to discuss it, I was not explicitly asking them to position themselves within the categories.

The following extracts illustrate that the east-west labels prevail over other social categories when the participants make sense of difference. For example, when discussing attitudes to luxurious products, Franziska claimed:

Also, ihr ist Luxus wichtig, ihr ist es wichtig, dass es teuer ist, und...uh...ja also, weil sie ist ganz anders, also sie ist nicht in der ehemaligen DDR aufgewachsen und sie ist wirklich ein total...ihr ist Luxus ganz ganz wichtig.

(I mean, luxury is important to her, it's important to her that it's expensive and...um...yeah, I mean, because she is completely different, I mean she didn't grow up in the former GDR and she is really a total...luxury is really really important to her.)

Here, Franziska uses the example of a colleague who places significant importance on luxury to position herself as a more modest and appreciative consumer. Importantly, she links her colleague's behaviour to the fact that she comes from the west. There could be a number of other social factors to explain why Franziska's colleague's behaviour is different to her own, yet Franziska considers it to be part of her west Germanness. That the stereotype is used by the participants to explain differences in their social surroundings also sheds light on how the idea that the east and west contrast one another is perpetuated in Germany. Each time the stereotype is used to understand the behaviour of others,

the distinction between the east and west is being affirmed and thus strengthened.

The conception that the east and west contrast one another was not only drawn upon to understand the behaviour of westerners, but also that of easterners. In the following extract, Anna explains why she believes easterners are more modest consumers with comparatively lower expectations than westerners:

Ich glaube, dass Leute, die aus dem Osten kommen und die diese Zeit kennen, wo es immer etwas gab, was sie nicht haben konnten, dass die sich irgendwann versorgt haben mit allem, was sie haben wollten und dann sind sie versorgt, irgendwann sind sie dann gesättigt.

(I think that people who come from the east and know this time, where there was always something that they couldn't have, that at some point they've got everything that they want, and then they're taken care of, at some point then they're satisfied.)

In this case, Anna is also drawing on the stereotype to make a broad judgement about easterners. She does not consider that the population of the GDR were differentiated, nor that the eastern population in contemporary Germany have experienced the two decades since unification differently, and therefore are unlikely to perceive consumption in the same way. By linking these behaviours to the whole of the eastern population, Anna is homogenising the east, and, as she is defining them against people who did not experience the GDR, ultimately also the west.

Therefore, it appears that the east-west distinction significantly influences social perceptions – it frames the way that the participants make sense of difference, effectively overriding alternative social categories. Although the majority of the participants did not use the categories to position themselves, all of them implicitly used the stereotypes at some point in the interview to explain or affirm their social perceptions about other people. The distinction seems to be so ingrained into the participants' conceptions that it acts as a first port of call when they are seeking to understand and categorise perceived social differences. This tendency indicates how the distinction between the east and the west may be

perpetuated. Each time an individual engages with the stereotype to explain their social perceptions, despite the fact it does not reflect their more complex understandings, the stereotype is being strengthened and continued.

### **Explicit understandings of east and west**

This section explores how the participants responded explicitly to the distinction between the east and the west. The first part focuses on the fourth phase of the interview, where the participants were asked specifically to engage with the labels. After explaining how this activity was carried out, the chapter moves on to explore the participants' responses. From the findings of the categorisation task, they were separated into two groups, each one consisting of ten people, so exactly half of the interviewees. The first group carried out the activity without hesitation, instinctively differentiating between the two groups. The second group were less comfortable about my request for them to make such broad categorisations. However, despite their reservations, all of them carried out the activity, and in doing so reproduced the east-west stereotypes. What is more, the categorisations that they made during the activity were frequently at odds with their spoken narratives in this phase of the interview, where they provided anecdotes about people they know who deviated from the clichés.

The following part of this section analyses how the participants overtly discussed the perception that there is a distinction between the east and the west. Here, participants were divided into three groups according to their perceptions. The first group, which was also the smallest, consisting of only two people, overtly maintained the view that they had expressed throughout the interview that it was possible to broadly distinguish between the east and west. Notably, these participants were the only two who demonstrated a consistent view throughout the whole interview. The other two groups were more critical of the ongoing differentiation between east and west. The second group, which was made up of twelve participants, distanced their own perceptions from the broad distinction, claiming it did not correspond to the way that they understood others. The third

group, consisting of six interviewees, took their criticism one step further, expressing anger and frustration about the uses of the distinction in the public sphere. Importantly, despite the critical views that these participants expressed when overtly discussing the east-west distinction in the interview, they all implicitly used the distinction elsewhere either to position themselves, or to explain difference.

The final part of this section further explores the findings of the interviews from the participants in groups two and three. These participants further distanced their own perceptions from the stereotypes by asserting that it is mainly the older generation who engage with the clichés. In doing so, these groups not only expressed criticism about the use of the stereotype to understand others, but also manage to convey that they held more complex and sophisticated perceptions.

#### The categorisation task

In the fourth phase of the interview, where the issue of east and west was explored most explicitly, the participants were asked to carry out a categorisation task. They were given a list of consumer characteristics, which are relevant to the ways that east and west Germanness are presented in popular discourse.<sup>44</sup> They were requested to mark the importance of each characteristic for themselves, and then to rank the importance of each one for east and west Germans, so to put the east and west into broad categories. This task deliberately left the participants with little room for manoeuvre, as they had to work with the labels that they were provided with, which revealed how they responded when they were asked directly to categorise quite crudely between the east and west.

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<sup>44</sup> The list explored perceptions of price and quality, credit, advertising and shopping habits as well as the importance of brand. See appendices 10, 11 and 12 for a full list of the characteristics.

*Group one: Intuitive understandings of east-west difference*

The first group proceeded with the activity without hesitation and finished it relatively quickly. It consisted of the five participants who had implicitly made reference to the east and west during the first phase of the interview, and five of those who had not. They appeared to intuitively know how to categorise the two groups and spent little time thinking about where they should place the labels. One participant, Marie, even spoke about how easy she had found it to categorise the two groups instinctively, proudly stating:

Und dafür musste ich nicht gucken, was hier schon liegt, um das zu machen, sondern intuitiv sozusagen. Ich habe jetzt nicht geguckt, was liegt hier..uh..ich mache das dann da unten, ich habe es einfach so gelesen und spontan...so soll es ja auch sein.

(And I didn't have to look at what was already here to do this, instead it was kind of intuitive. I didn't look at what was here..um..I did this here below, I just read it and spontaneously...that's how it should be.)

Importantly, the participants who instinctively carried out activity were the same ones who demonstrated an intuitive sense of east and west Germanness in other parts of the interview. Their categorisations corresponded very closely to the stereotypical view of easterners and westerners, for example, both of the participants characterised westerners as being consumer-orientated and easterners as more careful consumers. This finding illustrates not only the resonance of the distinction among these participants, but also of the characteristics associated with each label.

*Group two: Hesitant responses to the east-west distinction*

The second group of participants showed more hesitance, and at times resistance when asked to carry out the task. Although all ten people did complete the activity, they made it clear that they deemed the broad categorisations to be too simplistic and claimed that they felt under pressure to make judgements that they were uncomfortable with. As may be expected, none of these participants

made direct reference to east and west to position themselves in the first phase of the interview. It is also notable that these participants proved themselves to be the most reflective of the sample in other parts of the interview. Unlike the first group, they tended to spend more time considering questions and generally provided more nuanced narratives on east and west Germanness than the above group.

The following extract, taken from Claudia's interview, is typical of the way that this second group responded to the categorisation task. After I had explained the activity, she became flustered and claimed 'OK...in den neuen Ländern. Ach Claire...das hängt von den Leuten ab' (Okay, in the new *Länder*. Aah, Claire...it depends on the people). I responded by asking if it was at all possible to categorise the groups generically, which was met by quite a large amount of hesitation and sighing from Claudia. She then said, 'schwierig, von wem gehe ich jetzt aus, Claire? Also es gibt immer diese großen Unterschiede im Ostteil, also die, die Geld haben, und die, die kein Geld haben' (difficult, who should I base it on, Claire? I mean, there are always big differences in the east, I mean, those who have money and those who don't have any money). Following this, I prompted her to summarise her point by asking if she meant that the categorisation task was not complex enough. Claudia replied, 'ja, weil du hast...auch im Westteil gibt es Arbeitslose und Leute, die kein Geld haben' (yes, because in the west you've also got, there are unemployed people, and people who do not have any money). She then agreed to carry out the task, and on finishing, stated, 'ich denke schon, dass das Klischee ist so, meiner Meinung nach jetzt, aber es gibt dann immer noch Unterschiede' (I think that the cliché is like this, in my opinion that is, but then there are still always differences).

There are two key points to be drawn from the way that Claudia and others in this second group responded to the categorisation task. First, it is striking that they carried out the categorisation task despite their reservations. This group did indeed verbally challenge the stereotyping of the two groups and emphasised that there is differentiation on both sides, which indicates that they were uncomfortable with the sweeping generalisations. Yet, in the practical activity



they reproduced the east-west stereotypes in the same way as the first group outlined above. It should be noted that the participants were asked specifically to work within the categories of east and west. However, *they* decided how to characterise each group. Their characterisations corresponded closely to the popular stereotypes, even though none of the participants identified themselves with either of their own groupings. What is more, they mirrored the stark black and white images painted in the popular discourse by placing their characterisations of the two groups at the most extreme points of the scale. For example, easterners were consistently characterised as very rarely buying themselves expensive items, while westerners were viewed to do this very often. Although the participants consciously resist east-west differentiation in more sophisticated discussions about the issue, the stereotypes about each group come through with vigour when the participants characterise people within the east-west framework.

The people on whom this group based their conceptualisations of east and west in the categorisation task is also relevant here. Although they reproduced the stereotypes in the activity, eight of the ten participants in this group made it clear from the outset that their categorisations should not be taken as all-encompassing, but were based on people whom they knew. What is more, some participants in this group contradicted their own rationale in discussions after they had completed the task. After claiming they were basing their conceptualisations on people with whom they had personal contact, they went on to describe people they knew who contrasted their representation. For example:

Also, das ist nur eine ganz subjektive...da habe ich natürlich gewisse Menschen vor Augen, die ich kenne, aber da gibt's bestimmt genauso viele Ostdeutsche, die ganz spontan einkaufen wie Westdeutsche, die ganz wenig spontan kaufen. Also meine Schwiegermutter zum Beispiel ist ja westdeutsch und..uh..und sie ist sehr sehr geizig mit sich selbst und mit anderen, also sehr sehr sparsam und gar nicht spontan mit dem Einkaufen.

(I mean, that's only a completely subjective...here I've obviously got specific people that I know in mind, but there are certainly as many easterners who shop spontaneously, as well as westerners who rarely shop spontaneously. I

mean, my mother-in-law is west German for example and..um..and she is very thrifty with herself and with others, I mean very very frugal and not at all spontaneous when it comes to shopping.)

Here, Sonja indeed emphasises that both the east and west are differentiated, which makes it difficult for her to generalise about the two groups. However, the example she then proposes directly contradicts the characterisation she has made; having labelled the west as primarily spontaneous shoppers, she describes frugal and careful attitudes of her west German mother-in-law. It appears then, that these participants' personal experiences did not form the basis of their categorisations, but were superseded by the popular ideas of what it is to come from the east or the west. In fact, it appears that the participants construct expectations about others according to the east-west stereotypes. They then understand the behaviour of others to fit in with these expectations.

The second point to be made with regard to Claudia's narrative above is that, like the other participants in this second group, she makes a clear distinction between clichés and her perception of the 'truth'. She demonstrates awareness of the stereotypes, even using them to carry out the categorisation task, but is keen to highlight that they are only clichés and that her perception of east and west is more complex and differentiated. Significant here are the tensions between the participants' perceptions of the 'truth' and their understandings of the stereotype. In the following extract, which was taken from the third phase of the interview, where the participants discussed the advertisements, Sabine makes the same distinction as Claudia. Having correctly identified which advertisement was targeted at the east and which at the west, she goes on to discuss the appropriateness of the images that they portray:

Vielleicht stimmen sie noch. Ich weiß es nicht...ich, ich funktioniere nicht mit den Klischees. Ich denke nicht, der Osten ist so und der Westen ist so, so denke ich nicht. Ich denke, es ist personenabhängig.

(Perhaps they are still correct. I don't know...I, I don't work with the clichés. I don't think that the east is like this and the west is like that, I don't think like that. I think it depends on the person.)

The tendency for this group to differentiate their perceptions of the 'truth' and clichés can perhaps be explained as a strategy which enables their own more complex conceptions to exist alongside the popular stereotypes. By separating their own perceptions from the clichés, they appear to have eradicated the fear that their views may be judged according to the clichés, and are therefore more willing to engage with them.

It would, however, be misleading to suggest that, by separating their own views from the clichés, this group is able to distinguish between the two with complete clarity. Some, such as Sabine, did indeed seem to make a reasonably explicit distinction. On the one hand, she did not reject the clichés altogether, illustrated by the uncertainty she expresses regarding the accuracy of the stereotypes in her statement: 'Perhaps they are still correct'. Nevertheless, by claiming, 'I think it depends on the person', she points out that the stereotypes have little influence over the way she perceives others. Comparatively speaking, then, there is little crossover between the clichés and Sabine's perception of 'truth'.

Reading other participants' interviews demonstrated, however, that the clichés and their perceptions of 'truth' are much more closely entwined. It is useful to return to Claudia's interview to exemplify this point; in the above extract she claims, 'ich denke schon, dass das Klischee ist so, [...] aber es gibt dann immer noch Unterschiede' (I think that the cliché is like this, [...] but then there are still always differences). From the structure of her narrative, it appears that she is framing her perceptions of easterners and westerners within the cliché, and then adding her own conception of complexities and differentiation to the stereotype. This discursive construction can be compared to Sonja's narrative in the section on the positioning of the self with reference to the east and west, where she locates her husband's west Germanness.<sup>45</sup> Here, Sonja conceptualises the west German stereotype as the norm and then accounts for the way that her husband differs from the stereotype by labelling him an exception. Therefore, the stereotype forms the basis for these participants' expectations of others. They

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<sup>45</sup> See p. 148.

appear unable to completely separate their more differentiated notion of east and west from the clichés; instead, they incorporate their relatively complex perceptions into the stereotypical image.

### Explicit perceptions of the east-west distinction

Once the interviewees had completed the categorisation task, we went on to talk explicitly about the perception that there are ongoing differences between the east and west. This elicited some insightful responses from the participants, not least because at times their narratives differed greatly from how they had responded to or engaged with east-west difference elsewhere in the interview. The findings in this section shed further light on existing claims about the *Mauer im Kopf*. Research into this concept looks explicitly at the idea that there is a gap between the east and west. This is generally problematised as a threat to the inner unity of Germany, and, by some scholars, presented as a problem which is caused by easterners failing to move forwards into the context of unified Germany.<sup>46</sup> The findings suggest that the *Mauer im Kopf* may not be as prevalent as is often claimed. The majority of the participants were either critical of the idea or rejected it out of hand. The participants' narratives also indicate the reasons for their criticism – it seems that they are to some extent driven by the idea that the east is the inferior group in east-west comparisons.

#### *Group one: 'There are distinct differences between the east and west'*

Only two interviewees explicitly maintained that, in line with the idea of the *Mauer im Kopf*, there was a clear-cut difference between easterners and westerners. These were the same participants who intuitively carried out the categorisation task without hesitation. When talking about recognising easterners and westerners purely on the basis of first impressions, Marie proclaimed:

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<sup>46</sup> See pp. 32-34 for an overview of the claims made by scholars such as Mühlberg (1999) and Thierse (2000) about the concept of the *Mauer im Kopf*.

Es passiert mir *total* selten, also wirklich sehr selten, dass ich daneben liege, dass ich falsch liege, das passiert dann vielleicht einmal von 50 mal oder so.

(It happens *incredibly* rarely, I mean, really very rarely that I don't get it right, that I'm wrong, that maybe happens one in fifty times.)

It is clear that Marie overtly perceives easterners and westerners to hold a common set of characteristics, and that it is possible to discuss the two groups homogenously. The characteristics that these two participants have in mind refer not only to consumer attitudes, but also communication techniques and other social behaviours, such as community spirit. This extract follows on from the above in Marie's interview:

Wenn ein Wessi nicht einverstanden ist, sagt er, dass er nicht einverstanden ist. So ist der Unterschied, ja. Der Ossi sagt nichts mehr und denkt für sich, sozusagen, was ist das für ein Idiot. Aber er hält sich zurück und wenn ein Ossi stumm wird, merkst du, der ist nicht einverstanden.

(If a *Wessi* disagrees, he says that he disagrees. That's the difference, yeah. The *Ossi* stops speaking and thinks to himself, something like, what a complete idiot. But he holds himself back and when an *Ossi* doesn't say anything, you know that he disagrees.)

The way that Marie explains the characteristics of the two groups conveys the homogeneity that she applies to the two groups with even more clarity. She talks generically about easterners and westerners, without making exception or acknowledging differentiation, and thereby attributes a particular communicative behaviour to the *whole* group.

*Group two: 'The east-west distinction is too simplistic'*

With the exception of these two participants, however, the interviewees indicated that they do not believe that the clear-cut distinction holds much water when discussing it explicitly. Twelve of the remaining eighteen interviewees distanced themselves from the categorisation, claiming it did not fit with their perceptions, so they did not use it. In reference to the labels *Ossi* and *Wessi*, Anna stated:

Also ich habe wirklich, also ich versuche immer mir genauer anzuschauen und ich bin der Meinung, dass manchmal der Unterschied zwischen Stadt und Land viel größer ist als der zwischen Ost und West. Deshalb...ja...also ich mag die irgendwie nicht so, diese Begriffe, weil ich finde, es gibt so ganz andere Unterscheidungskriterien, die viel mehr aussagen.

(I mean I've really, I mean I always try to look more closely and I think that sometimes the between the city and the countryside is much bigger than the one between the east and west. So...yeah...I mean, I don't really like them much, these terms, because I think there are completely different criteria to differentiate people, that reveal much more.)

Like other interviewees cited in this analysis, Anna rejects the usefulness of the blanket terms, claiming it is more helpful to consider the individual in question, rather than judging them on the basis of where they come from. This section of Anna's narrative is, however, at odds with other parts of her interview. For example, her use of the east-west stereotype to explain consumer modesty among other people above contradicts her claim that east and west constitute unhelpful social labels. This contradiction was common to the participants in this group – despite criticising the east-west distinction in explicit discussions, ten of the twelve implicitly used the east and west as points of reference elsewhere in the interview.

*Group three: 'The east-west distinction is ignorant and out-dated'*

The final six narratives about explicit perceptions of the east-west distinction are comparable to group two, in that they also distanced themselves from the categorisation. However, unlike group two, group three also overtly criticised the ongoing differentiation between east and west in unified Germany. For example, Max stated with frustration and exasperation:

Und wenn man, ich sage mal, ruhig über was redet, dann ist man schon eher bei neuen Bundesländern, Westdeutschen oder Ostdeutschen. Ich finde persönlich die Trennung sowieso immer sehr fraglich, also 20 Jahre danach, ja, ich finde es schon auch irritierend, wenn man bei dem Wetterbericht sagt, in Ostdeutschland wären das and das. Das finde ich persönlich schon....hat einen Beigeschmack.

(And if you're, I mean, simply chatting about something then you're more likely to use *neue Bundesländer*, *Westdeutsche* or *Ostdeutsche*. I personally always find the division very dubious anyway, I mean 20 years afterwards, yeah, I find it pretty irritating when people giving the weather forecast say, it'll be like this and this in east Germany. I personally find that...has an aftertaste.)

Max takes his concerns a step further than those in the second group, even problematising the differentiation between east and west Germany in the weather forecast. Such a reaction perhaps seems a little extreme, particularly as similar geographical signifiers such as north and south Germany frequently appear in weather reports simply to indicate different forecasts. It does illustrate, however, the anger and frustration expressed by some participants with regard to the ongoing distinction. Like the participants in group two, however, Max often contradicted himself through his inconsistent uses of the east-west distinction. In the first phase of the interview, which focused on the 'organic' use of the labels, he in fact implicitly engaged with the categories to position himself and his wife.

The question is, why are these participants so critical of the distinction? An explanation could be that, when it comes to east-west comparisons, it is the east which is generally presented in a negative light. In some existing literature, these sentiments of inferiority are said to have led to a *zweite-Klasse-Mentalität* (second-class mentality) and *Trotzidentität* (identity of defiance).<sup>47</sup> Some of the participants' narratives about the east-west distinction are indeed quite defensive, which indicates that these concepts may well contribute to east Germanness. Questions relating to defensiveness do, however, require further exploration, and form an important part of the analysis throughout the thesis.

### Perceptions of the east-west distinction among others

All of the participants in groups two and three also claimed that the stereotypes influence how older generations perceive easterners and westerners more

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<sup>47</sup> These concepts, which are the focus of scholars such as Flockton (1999) and Charles-Ross (2002) are explained in full on pp. 34-36.

significantly than their own perceptions. Proposing others who are more led by the stereotype, and then criticising these groups, enabled the participants to distance themselves from the cliché and express more complex views. For example, Claudia asserted that:

Aber es gibt auch dann noch die Älteren, die wirklich, für die existiert ihr Osten, der Ostteil, und für die Westler ihr Westteil. Und ich denke mal, da ist schon dann, ja...noch so irgendwo diese Mauer so im Kopf, die da nichts damit was anfangen können.

(But then there's always older people, who really, for them it's about their east, the eastern *Länder*, and for the westerners the western *Länder*. And I think, then there really is, yeah...somewhere still this kind of wall in the head which you can't do anything with.)

Claudia's frustrated and mocking tone of voice when she refers to 'their east' implies that she considers such attachments to be misplaced and even ignorant. Her comment that 'you can't do anything with' the *Mauer im Kopf* highlights that she perceives it to be unproductive in the context of unified Germany. Claudia is evidently keen to show that the perceived east-west distinction does not play a role in her perceptions. By projecting the *Mauer im Kopf* onto the older generation, she takes her distance from the distinction one step further – she is excluding herself and her generation from such a simplistic perception.

The participants' claims that the east-west stereotype dominates others' perceptions also suggests that they do not explicitly believe there to be clear east-west differences, but that they consider the distinction to be imagined. For example, Alexander explained:

Nee, also in unserer Generation geht's nicht um Ost und West. Das ist vielleicht in den Köpfen der Generation vor uns, also meine Eltern, oder unsere Eltern, dass das da vielleicht noch abläuft im Kopf, dass man da diese Trennung noch hat.

(No, I mean it's not about east and west in our generation. It's perhaps in the heads of the generation before us, so my parents or our parents, where that's perhaps still going, that people still have this separation there.)



Significantly, he repeatedly uses the term 'head', emphasising that it is here that the wall exists, so that the older generation *imagines* that there is a distinct east and west. This means that, according to the participants' explicit claims, there are no substantive differences between the east and west, that is to say no distinction to be seen in terms of behaviour or attitudes. The distinction exists because other people *believe* that there are differences.

Other participants conveyed the same idea even more emphatically than Alexander, as the following extract from Jan's interview illustrates:

Aber wie die Leute dann im Großen und Ganzen denken, ich glaube, die denken immer noch an Unterschiede. [...] Naja, das denken wahrscheinlich die ehemaligen Westdeutschen genauso wie die Ostdeutschen. Ich glaube, die älteren Generationen haben wie gerade gesagt, so eine Blockade, so ein Denken wahrscheinlich.

(But how people think on the whole, I would say they still think in terms of difference. [...] Yeah, the former west Germans probably think that as much as the east Germans. I think the older generation has probably got, like I just said, a kind of block, that kind of thinking.)

By claiming that the majority of people 'think in terms of difference', Jan rejects the idea that there are actual differences, and instead suggests that the east-west distinction frames others' social perceptions. He then brings his point home by explicitly labelling the east-west distinction as a 'kind of thinking'. These participants are ultimately discounting two perspectives about the east and west in unified Germany here. First, the possibility that there are actual or perceivable characteristics which allow either easterners or westerners to be conceived as a coherent group. Second, that the two groups can be easily distinguished from one another, that is to say that there are no crossovers or commonalities between the two groups.

## Conclusion

This chapter has shown that, across the interviews, there was a discrepancy between the ways that the participants implicitly used the east-west distinction

and how they discuss it more explicitly. Only five of the interviewees explicitly used the markers as points of reference at the beginning of the interview, when the questions asked bore no explicit correlation to the east-west distinction. Nevertheless, the vast majority of the participants implicitly used the stereotype elsewhere in their narratives to explain or affirm their perceptions of others. As may be expected, the terms were used more frequently by the participants as the interview questions engaged with them increasingly explicitly. During the categorisation task, half of the participants worked with the groupings without hesitation and often instinctively. The remaining half did express hesitation, but went on to reproduce the stereotypes nonetheless. It seems, then, that the stereotypes do indeed resonate, despite the fact that they are consistently at odds with the participants' personal experience of others as well as their explicit opinions about the east-west distinction.

It appears that the main conclusion to be drawn here can be taken from the participants themselves – that the differences between the east and west are not palpable, but exist as perceptions, ways of making sense of others. The participants' perceptions of difference are indeed influenced by the stereotype, as demonstrated by its resonance in their implicit narratives. However, their personal experiences are not accurately depicted by the broad categories and, in their overt discussions, they were critical of the ongoing distinction. There is a clear tension here – despite the participants' explicit rejection of the distinction, it consistently overrides their personal experiences when they explain broad social difference. Its influence is such that it even appears to determine their expectations about others' behaviour, so that easterners and westerners who do not fit the stereotype are seen as exceptions to the rule. This means that the participants are falling prey to the same *imagined* distinction that they are so critical of. In doing so, they are effectively perpetuating the distinction and the stereotypical connotations that each label holds.

## Chapter Five

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### Not like the rest:

### Negotiating east Germanness through rejection

In contemporary Germany, the label 'east German' immediately conjures up distinctive images which have become a part of popular discourse since unification. The resonance of these perceptions was reflected during the interviews for this project, where the participants worked with different popular ideas in order to construct their own east Germanness and that of other easterners. They engaged primarily with ideas relating to economic circumstances, consumer behaviours and attitudes, social solidarity in unified Germany and attachments to the past. There are clear differences between these sets of ideas – as well as relating to different forms of social categorisation, some refer to mentality and others to circumstances, which are more demonstrable. They have been brought together to shed further light on east identity processes because they were raised *by the participants* during the interviews. It should be noted that the focus on consumption and gift-giving in the interview design is likely to have contributed to the dominance of these ideas in the participants' narratives. It is unsurprising that the themes of economic circumstances and consumer attitudes, for example, were raised in discussions about consumption. Importantly, however, the decision to base the interviews around the theme of consumption resulted from the findings of the pilot interviews, which revealed that consumption under capitalism was a key theme in the participants' understandings of east Germanness.<sup>48</sup> As anticipated, these themes also resonated in the participants' narratives during the subsequent sets of interviews. They negotiated their east Germanness by both identifying themselves with and distancing themselves from these different sets of ideas. Exploring the sets of ideas around which the participants position their identities provides a more complete picture of how they conceptualise east Germanness. These identification and distancing processes are very complex, therefore, for purposes

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<sup>48</sup> The findings of the pilot interviews are outlined in full on pp. 121-124.

of clarity, these findings have been divided into two chapters. This chapter explores the perceptions which the participants reject in their identity processes. Those that they incorporate into their self-perceptions are examined in chapter six.

The analysis in this chapter is structured according to the sets of perceptions which the participants defined as east German but distanced themselves from in their narratives. The first section looks at economic circumstances, the second at consumer attitudes and the third at *Ostalgie*. They are analysed in this order to reflect the different roles that they play in identity processes. The participants considered economic circumstances to be relatively demonstrable, and therefore to require less explanation in their narratives. In comparison, it seemed that the participants considered consumer attitudes to be more subjective perceptions. Consequently they provided more detail in their accounts to explain their own consumer attitudes and distance themselves from unfavourable popular perceptions of eastern consumers. Stereotypes relating to *Ostalgie* triggered by far the most complex responses from the participants – they were very keen to emphasise their distance from *ostalgic* easterners. This suggests that, of all the negative perceptions raised by the participants, *Ostalgie* causes the most concern when it comes to their identity processes. In the participants' eyes, it seems that *Ostalgie* has the most influence in the public sphere, and therefore is the most likely to misconstrue their own understandings. Each section explores how the participants engage with the different ideas about the east when discussing others and the ways that they work with them in their own identity processes. Analysing their perceptions of others reveals that, in line with the findings in the chapter on east-west difference, they are formulated within the framework of east-west distinction. In this sense, they are affirming east-west difference in their narratives. This finding corresponds to those in the previous chapter about implicit uses of the east-west distinction.<sup>49</sup> What they do challenge, however, is

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<sup>49</sup> See pp. 144-155 for analysis of the participants' implicit uses of the east-west distinction. It should be noted that, although the east-west distinction is explored in this chapter as well as the previous one, the role it plays in the analysis is not the same. Chapter four focused on the role played by the distinction in the participants' perceptions of social difference. This chapter

the simplicity of these categories. By adding detail and clarification to these labels, they redefine east Germanness and make it more complex and differentiated.

### **Economic circumstances**

This section explores how the participants engaged with economic circumstances in order to position themselves and others. As was explained in chapter four, fifteen of the twenty interviewees referred to economic circumstances in order to socially position themselves.<sup>50</sup> The analysis here is divided into two parts; the first looks at the participants' perceptions of others and the second at their self-understandings. Examining how they construct their perceptions of others reveals that their understandings of economic circumstances are framed with the idea of east-west difference. In line with popular perceptions, the east was depicted as economically underprivileged, and the west as being markedly more prosperous. When discussing their own economic circumstances, however, the participants made no direct mention of east and west. Instead, they implicitly distanced themselves from their own characterisations of the two groups by labelling their own circumstances as 'normal'. This process enables them to adopt features from each group; they emphasise that they enjoy economic stability like westerners, but also highlight that, as easterners, they are modest and appreciative consumers.

### Economic circumstances and perceptions of others

When reading how the participants engaged with economic circumstances in their narratives about others, it was evident that their understandings were

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focuses on the popular perceptions from which the participants distance themselves in their identity processes. The east-west distinction comes into play here because the participants rejected distinctive popular perceptions within this framework. The main focus, however, are the perceptions attached to the categories, and the ways that the participants respond to them.

<sup>50</sup> See pp. 146-147.

entwined with the east-west distinction. For example, when Franziska claimed that the east and west take different approaches to gift-giving and I asked why, she told me:

Ja, weil, ich weiß nicht, das hat auch vielleicht viel damit zu tun, vielleicht haben die schon in Ostdeutschland weniger Geld.

(Yeah because, I don't know, that has perhaps got something to do with, perhaps they do have less money in east Germany.)

By drawing upon the idea that easterners have less money to explain why she perceives that the east are more modest in their gift-giving behaviours, Franziska is using economic circumstances to explain east-west difference in more detail. This finding sheds light on two important points. First, Franziska is affirming east-west difference through this characterisation. Her account about economic circumstances does not challenge the perception that the east and west act as polar opposites, but clarifies where these differences stem from. What she is challenging, however, is the simplicity of the east-west distinction. By discussing economic difference within the east-west framework, Franziska is adding detail to the distinction and thus presenting a more complex picture than the one which commonly appears in popular discourse. Second, she is engaging with popular ideas about the east and west in order to formulate these explanations. Her perception that the east can be characterised by economic hardship corresponds to the common perception that the east is lagging behind the wealthier west. Franziska was by no means alone in her tendency to use economic circumstances to explain east-west difference. The following account from Claudia's interview is also typical of the participants' understandings:

Jetzt 20 Jahre danach, ich denke mal, ja, es wird immer noch den Unterschied geben, weil ja der Ostteil ist ja viel ärmer als der Westteil und..uh..es gibt auch sehr hohe Arbeitslosigkeit und viele Familien, also die auch denn, das nennt sich Hartz IV, diese Sozialleistung bekommen, die halt denn nicht so viel schenken können. Ich denke mal, da gibt es schon einen Unterschied, wo man denn sagt, ok in West- und Ostberlin, also in Westberlin ist das überhaupt gar kein Problem. Die Eltern haben, viele

haben viel Geld oder haben Geld und können ihren Kindern ohne Probleme alles schenken.

(Now, 20 years afterwards I think, yeah, there will always be a difference because the east is much poorer than the west and...um...there's very high unemployment and many families, I mean who also, it's called *Hartz IV*, get this social security benefit, and who then can't buy as many presents. I think that there's definitely a difference there, when you say, okay, in west and east Berlin, I mean in west Berlin there's absolutely no problem. The parents have, many have a lot of money or have money and can give their children everything without any problems.)

Like Franziska, Claudia attributes distinctive circumstances to east and west Germany, labelling the east as relatively poor in comparison to the wealthier west. She uses these characterisations to add depth and complexity to the straightforward east-west distinction. Claudia is therefore following the same pattern as Franziska in her narrative – she is providing a more detailed explanation of east-west difference, but in doing so also affirming the distinction.

What is particularly striking here are the homogenous descriptions that she provides for both categories. Her narrative suggests that the entire eastern population is economically privileged, and that the west can be generically characterised by its prosperity. She does not account for differentiation within these two groups, making no mention of economic hardship in the west or privileged easterners. Such broad and homogenous characterisations are especially noteworthy in Claudia's case. The previous chapter illustrated that she was in fact one of the participants who most resisted the east-west categories when specifically asked to work within them during the interview.<sup>51</sup> The above extract illustrates however, that the straightforward east-west categories play a key role in the way that Claudia makes sense of those around her. She does indeed challenge the superficiality of the idea that the east and west act as polar opposites by proposing reasons for this difference. However, the characterisations that she provides to explain the difference uncritically reflect the homogeneity presented in popular discourse.

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<sup>51</sup> See p. 158.

Claudia's above account also reveals that she takes a relatively empathetic view of underprivileged easterners. This sentiment was typical of the participants' narratives about economic circumstances. In Claudia's case, it is evident from the detailed narrative that she provides. She begins by simply characterising the east as relatively poor, but goes on to clarify this by presenting the economic hardship in the east as the result of a struggling economy. This suggests that she does not hold the eastern population responsible for their economic situation or for the difference it creates between the east and west. The significance of this finding will become clearer following the analysis of the participants' perceptions of consumer attitudes and *Ostalgie*. As their narratives shift from more self-evident social markers, such as economic circumstances, to more subjective perceptions and stereotypes, the participants express less and less empathy towards other easterners.

#### Economic circumstances and perceptions of the self

This section addresses where the participants locate themselves within the characterisations outlined above, and the extent to which their self-perceptions differ from the ways they view others. The participants only used the broad categories of 'richer' and 'poorer' in relation to the east and west as generic groups. They did not engage with these rather simplistic characterisations to refer to themselves, nor to people with whom they have personal contact. This is illustrated by the use of the neutral pronoun 'man' and the third person in the form of 'sie', and even 'die', which implies even more distance.

When discussing their own economic circumstances, these participants, as noted in the previous chapter, do not explicitly refer to east and west. Returning to an extract from Claudia's interview which was cited in chapter four is helpful here. On first glance, it suggests that her perception of her economic circumstances is not only free from the labels of east and west, but also from the broad 'rich' and 'poor' characterisation that she makes above:



Und ich denke mal, es [...] hängt mit der Kindheit zusammen, wie du aufgewachsen bist...bist du in normalen Verhältnissen aufgewachsen oder bist du so halt mit Reichtum aufgewachsen, wo Geld keine Rolle spielt.

(And I think it's [...] linked to childhood, how you grew up...did you grow up in normal circumstances or did you have a wealthy upbringing, where money was not an issue.)

The way that Claudia presents herself does not appear to fit with either the image she paints of an easterner, nor that of a westerner. Claudia positions herself somewhere in the middle of the spectrum of economic circumstances, thus rejecting both the 'poor' and 'rich' labels that she uses to describe the east and west. This is demonstrated by her use of the adjective 'normal', which implies that her background was not particularly wealthy, but also that she did not suffer economic hardship. In many ways, Claudia's statement is not particularly striking – it is to be expected that the 'norm' in terms of economic circumstances is located somewhere between the more extreme categories of 'rich' and 'poor'. What is striking, however, is that Claudia does not apply this 'norm' to the majority – by labelling easterners as poor and westerners as rich, she is locating the majority of people at the extreme ends of the spectrum of economic circumstances. The contradiction, then, is that her understanding of 'normal' can only be applicable to a minority. There is therefore a clear tension between Claudia's characterisation of the east and west respectively as 'poor' and 'rich' and her use of 'normal' to present herself. Her self-perception does not match either of her characterisations, yet she labelled it as the norm. This discrepancy can perhaps be explained as an attempt on Claudia's part to normalise her circumstances. As demonstrated in the literature review, the east is generally depicted as the divergent group in representations about the east and west.<sup>52</sup> Claudia appears to be challenging this idea in her interview by emphasising that

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<sup>52</sup> The tendency to depict the east as a divergent group is outlined in the sections on *Ostalgie*, on pp. 29-32, and on the *zweite-Klasse-Mentalität*, on pp. 34-36.

her own economic situation fits into to the capitalist ideals of contemporary Germany.<sup>53</sup>

It is also significant that, although she uses economic circumstances to define the east and west, she does not explicitly use the labels when presenting herself. Instead, Claudia implicitly locates herself in relation to her characterisations of the east and west:

Zum Beispiel dieses Nintendo, der kostet 149€, das ist sehr viel Geld für so ein kleines Ding für ein 7-jähriges Kind. Und das finde ich, [...] ich sträube mich dagegen, wir könnten das kaufen, wir könnten das dreimal, viermal, fünfmal kaufen, aber ich sage, es ist zu teuer für dieses Kind.

(For example, this Nintendo, it costs €149, which is an awful lot of money for such a little thing for a 7 year old child. And I find that, [...] I am reluctant, we could buy it, we could buy it three, four or five times over, but I say, it's too expensive for this child.)

In this extract, she is talking about a west German friend who has bought her seven year old daughter what Claudia perceives to be an expensive computer game. She explains her reluctance to buy the game by clarifying that she *could* buy the game if she wishes, that is, she does have the economic means. This claim is at odds with her perceptions of easterners – in the above extract she stated that they '*can't* buy as many presents'. Here, Claudia is identifying herself as an individual who shares in the economic stability that she believes exists in the west. Yet she does not identify fully with her characterisation of the west, as illustrated by her claim that she '*chooses* not to buy the game', unlike her west German friend. She therefore identifies with the east insofar as she defines herself as a modest consumer. However, she suggests that she has chosen to consume in this way, while other easterners have no choice but to be modest consumers because of economic hardship. Therefore she normalises her own economic circumstances by likening them to those in the west, but maintains her east Germanness by presenting herself as a modest consumer.

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<sup>53</sup> It is useful to bear Claudia's economic situation in mind here – as explained fully in appendix three, which explains the participants' backgrounds, Claudia works as a teacher and enjoys a relatively comfortable lifestyle.

It was common for the participants to conceptualise their own economic circumstances in this way, as demonstrated by the following extract from Felix's interview:

Aber es ist, glaube ich, es kommt immer darauf an, aus welchen Verhältnissen du stammst, ob du aus normalen Verhältnissen, so wie wir alle, stammst, oder eben aus etwas ärmeren oder aus sehr sehr reichen Verhältnissen. Also da, glaube ich, davon hängt das ab. Was du für einen Lebensstil schon vorher hattest, mit welchen Verhältnissen du aufgewachsen bist, wie du das alles würdigst und so.

(But it's, I think, it always depends on the circumstances that you come from, whether you come from normal circumstances, like all of us, or from somewhat poorer or from very very rich circumstances. I mean, I think it depends on that. What kind of lifestyle you had before, which circumstances you grew up in, how you value everything and so on.)

In this extract, Felix is explaining why he believes he values consumables more than other people. He is even more explicit than Claudia in his self-positioning, as he distances himself from both ends of the spectrum of economic circumstances. Like Claudia, he claims he grew up under 'normal circumstances', so is normalising his own situation. He then attaches a distinctive attitude to those who grew up under 'normal circumstances', claiming that this group have a greater appreciation for the value of what they have. While there are differences in their narratives, Felix and Claudia are actually making the same point. They do not wish to be characterised in the same way as they perceive the east, so as people facing economic hardship. Nevertheless, they are keen to point out that despite enjoying economic stability, they are careful and appreciative consumers – by emphasising this point, the participants are distancing themselves from their perceptions of the west.

A further telling point to emerge from the above extracts relates to the criteria used by the participants to define 'normal'. All of the participants refer to income and economic stability in their narratives, so factors which determine purchasing power in a *western* system. Research into consumption in the GDR has suggested that money played a lesser role here, and that mutual cooperation and contacts

were more important when it came to obtaining consumer goods.<sup>54</sup> It is therefore likely that the participants' modest experiences of consumption in the GDR were more heavily shaped by the fact that many goods were not readily available than by their families' economic circumstances. It seems then, that they have adopted western criteria in order to position and normalise their economic circumstances.

### **Consumer attitudes**

When defining their own east Germanness during the interviews, the participants also distanced themselves from negative distinctive eastern consumer attitudes. Of the twenty participants, eleven discussed consumer attitudes in order to socially position themselves. There were a number of similarities between their narratives about economic circumstances and those regarding consumer attitudes. First, the images that the participants painted of eastern consumers were framed by the idea of east-west difference and also corresponded largely to popular ideas. They depicted the typical easterner as a naïve and unsophisticated shopper who has failed to develop the skills of a critical consumer which the participants consider to be necessary in a capitalist society.<sup>55</sup> Second, in the same way that their perceptions of economic circumstances were formulated according to capitalist norms, the participants constructed their idea of a 'good' consumer according to the values of a western market economy. As the participants' self-perceptions were entwined with their perceptions of others in their accounts, they are explored alongside one another in the following section. The analysis shows how they believe other easterners approach consumption, and why they are critical of such attitudes. It also demonstrates how they express their distance from the easterners in question, and how their narratives here compare with those about economic circumstances.

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<sup>54</sup> Pp. 26-29 outline in more detail how consumption in the GDR is explained in existing research.

<sup>55</sup> The popular perceptions of the east as distinctive consumers are described on pp. 26-29.

### Perceptions of the east and the positioning of the self

When forming an image of a typical east German consumer, the participants referred predominantly to a lack of appreciation for higher quality products, which they explain as being longer lasting and more sophisticated. In the following extract, which is typical of the participants in this group, Max is talking about the fashion choices of people who come from Brandenburg, where he grew up:

Also ich finde, wenn du jetzt in Brandenburg auf jemanden triffst, der jetzt modern angezogen ist nach seinem Verständnis, da sind das irgendwelche ausgewaschenen Jeans, irgendwelcher Pullover mit einem Haufen Aufdrucken. Und wenn du jetzt hier, ich meine hier in Berlin-West irgendjemandem in moderner Kleidung triffst...der hat vielleicht auch eine Jeans an, aber das ist dann, ich sage mal, eine qualitativ sicherlich bessere Jeans ohne irgendwelche Verwaschungen und wahrscheinlich trägt dann einen einfarbigen oder maximal einen Pullover mit ein paar Streifen, wo du auch siehst, das ist bessere Qualität. [...] Also...ich persönlich empfinde momentan, dass, also in Ostdeutschland das Aussehen...etwas...extremer tendiert in die Richtung wilde Haarfarben bei Frauen, uh...wilde T-Shirts und Pullover, Applikationen, und dass im westlichen Teil alles, ich will mal sagen, gesitteter abläuft.

(Well, I find, when you come across someone in Brandenburg now who believes that he is dressed in a modern way, then it's some faded jeans, some sort of jumper with lots of things printed on it. And if you come across someone here, I mean here in west Berlin, in modern clothes...he will perhaps also be wearing jeans, but they'll be, I mean, definitely better quality jeans without any plastic effects on them and he'll probably wearing a single-coloured jumper, or at the most one with a few stripes, which you will also see is better quality. [...] I mean, at the moment I personally feel that, I mean in east Germany, appearances tend to be more extreme in that women have outrageous coloured hair, um...outrageous T-shirts and jumpers, appliqués, and that on the western side everyone, I mean, dresses in a more civilised way.)

Max engages heavily with the idea that the east and west act as polar opposites to formulate his perceptions, expressing the lack of sophistication on the eastern side by emphasising the conservative elegance of westerners. Similarly to the participants' narratives about economic circumstances, then, Max is also

affirming east-west difference in his account. It is in fact through this east-west framework that Max distances himself from this subgroup of easterners. These sentiments become evident when Max compares this group of easterners to westerners and depicts western attitudes to fashion as superior to those which exist in the east. In the space of one sentence, he twice claims that westerners buy 'better quality' clothes. His perceptions become even more explicit at the end of his account, where he describes eastern tastes as 'outrageous' and western ones as 'more civilised', therefore indicating that he considers eastern attitudes to be uncultured in the context of unified Germany. Importantly, the image that he paints of the eastern consumer corresponds largely to the popular idea that people from the east do not conform fully to western norms and values when it comes to shopping. As was the case with the participants' perceptions of eastern and western economic circumstances, then, their understandings of others' consumer attitudes appear to be very much shaped by popular discourse – their perceptions are bound by both the east-west distinction and the mainstream images conjured up by each label.

In response to Max's description of eastern and western consumer attitudes, I asked how his consumer choices compared to those of easterners. He replied:

Also ich bin es so gar nicht. Aber wenn ich in meinem Bekanntenkreis sehe, wie sie jetzt, meine Bekannten sich dort teilweise kleiden, die Klamotten sind Sachen, die würde ich nicht anziehen...das, was so ein Trend ist, das wird ja relativ schnell auch gekauft...uh...Haarfarben bei den Damen, die sind auch mal richtig wild und sie wechseln auch gerne, und das ist schon eine Sache, die ich finde, passiert in den neuen Bundesländern schneller und häufiger.

(No, I mean I'm not at all like that. But when I see people I know, what they now, what people I know there sometimes wear, the clothes are things, I wouldn't wear them...things that are in fashion, they're bought relatively quickly...um...the women's hair colours, they're also sometimes really outrageous and they like to change them too, and that's definitely something that I find happens more quickly and more frequently in the new *Länder*.)

The length and detail that Max provides in his response reflects how firmly he distances himself from his perception of some eastern consumers. First, he makes it very clear that he does not consider himself to belong to the group of easterners that he was describing, emphatically stating the he is 'not *at all* like that'. He then reiterates the criticism that he voiced when describing other easterners, once again referring to their tastes as 'outrageous' and using the first person to explicitly remove himself from this group. Finally he repeats that he associates these characteristics with those in the new *Länder*, by which he means outside of Berlin, so to a group from which he, as a Berliner, is automatically excluded.

Max was not alone in introducing a subgroup of easterners into his narrative and ascribing negative consumer characteristics to this group. In fact, in their accounts about distinctive eastern consumer attitudes, none of the participants treated the east as a homogenous group. They all used social markers to create a subgroup to which it was clear they did not belong, and thus emphasised their distance from the negative characteristics which they ascribed to this group. The participants used two different social markers in order to construct this group. The first was geographical location, as exemplified in Max's narrative above. He distinguished between Berliners and those living outside of Berlin, and characterised easterners outside of the capital as the more 'eastern' consumers. As a Berliner, he thereby avoided being pigeonholed by distinctive eastern consumer attitudes. The second, and more common marker used to construct an eastern subgroup was generation, as shown in the following extract. It is taken from a part of Jan's interview where he is considering the need for separate advertising strategies for the old and new *Länder*:

Ich glaube, es gibt immer noch Leute, die das brauchen, ja. Aber die sind jetzt nicht unbedingt in meinem Alter, sondern wahrscheinlich eher ein bisschen älter, ein paar Generationen vor mir.

(I think there are still people who need it, yeah. But they're not necessarily my age, but probably more likely a bit older, a couple of generations before me.)

Jan immediately distances himself from the subgroup that he constructs by using the phrase 'there are still people' – this suggests a generic group to which he does not belong. He then defines this group as older generation easterners, which means that he is automatically excluded from it by his age. Perhaps the strongest indicator that Jan does not associate himself with this group is where he discursively positions himself when he is constructing the subgroup. In the space of one sentence, he uses the first person twice to firmly separate himself from the subgroup. First, he claims that 'they're [...] not *my* age', and second, that they are 'a couple of generations before *me*'. The numerous measures Jan takes when constructing his narrative indicate that he is very keen to disassociate himself from these negative consumer characteristics. It seems, therefore that he fears being judged according to the mainstream perceptions of eastern consumers, and therefore that he perceives such ideas to resonate when it comes to popular understandings of the east.

Julia painted a similar picture of the eastern consumer to Jan in her narrative, in that she drew primarily on the idea that easterners do not have an eye for quality. In the following extract she is complaining about the low-budget gifts that her parents bought for her newborn son:

Aber ich hätte mir gewünscht, dass sie ihm was kaufen, was ich ihm vielleicht, also was ich mir nicht leisten kann, ihm zu kaufen, was weiß ich..Schiesser Unterwäsche oder Benetta Unterwäsche, irgendwas Teureres kaufen. Es war ein langer Kampf, bis sie es jetzt verstanden haben und jetzt fragen sie auch, was sie machen können. Zu Weihnachten zum Beispiel haben sie für die Polizeistation dazugelegt und es war zwar ein langer Weg, wo ich viel geredet habe mit ihnen.

(But I wished that they'd buy him something that I perhaps, I mean something that I couldn't afford to buy him, I don't know...*Schiesser* underwear or *Benetta* underwear, buy something more expensive. It was a long battle until they understood and now they even ask what they can do. At Christmas, for example, they contributed towards the police station and it was certainly a long road, where I talked to them a lot.)

As with Max's account, the image constructed by Julia is very similar to the popular ideas about eastern consumers. She portrays the older generation as



being ignorant to the correlation between price and quality, suggesting that they are naïve and inexperienced when it comes to western consumerism. Most striking about this extract is how she presents herself – Julia's intention here is not only to explain how she perceives other easterners to shop, but also, and perhaps more importantly, to define her own consumer attitudes. She presents herself as a form of mentor who was responsible for teaching her parents about brand awareness, an understanding which she considers to be important in a capitalist society. She is therefore not only distancing herself from those who she perceives are inept consumers, but depicting herself as an astute and brand-aware shopper who is able to guide others. This indicates that she does not identify with the group of unsophisticated and uncritical eastern consumers that she constructs in her narrative.

Analysing the participants' narratives about consumer attitudes and comparing them to those about economic circumstances sheds light on three findings which contribute to understanding eastern identity processes. It is important to account for the participants' expectations about the interview when drawing findings from their narratives – the participants may have been aware of my interest in their east Germanness, which could have led to them focusing more specifically on the east German aspects of their identities. This should not, however, detract from the usefulness of their narratives in revealing the broader role of their perceptions of east Germanness in their identities. The poster advertising for participants did not explicitly state that the aim of the project was to explore east Germanness, but instead explained the thesis as research into attitudes towards gift-giving in the new German *Länder* (see appendices one and two). Furthermore, at this stage in the interview, I had neither differentiated between the east and west in my questions, nor explicitly raised the issue of east Germanness. The tendency for the participants to position themselves according to the east-west distinction and typical east German characteristics, therefore, occurred without any prompting on my part, and thus shed light into how they identify themselves more broadly.

The first finding to be drawn from the analysis here relates to east-west difference – in their narratives about both economic circumstances and consumer attitudes the participants affirmed the east-west distinction. However, in both cases they also challenged the simplicity of the two labels by providing a more complex and in-depth explanation of the two groups than that presented in popular discourse. In their accounts about consumer attitudes the participants went one step further in challenging the simplicity of the east-west distinction. Here, they created a subgroup onto which they ascribed ‘eastern’ consumer characteristics, therefore accounting for differentiation with the eastern category.

The second concerns the amount of detail that the participants provide when discursively distancing themselves from the eastern group in question. When discussing consumer attitudes, the participants gave longer accounts, making it clear that they felt their views needed more explanation. In addition they ascribed these behaviours to a subgroup of easterners from which they were automatically excluded and frequently used the first person to remove themselves even more explicitly from this group. The reason for this increase in detail and complexity is perhaps that consumer attitudes are understood as being less self-evident than economic circumstances. It therefore makes sense that the participants gave more detailed and complex accounts in order to explain them. It is also important to bear in mind that in popular discourse east Germanness is associated with distinctive consumer attitudes which put easterners in a negative light. It therefore stands to reason that the participants would thoroughly explain where they position themselves in relation to these popular images to ensure that they are not misunderstood by them.

The third finding to come from comparing responses about economic circumstances and those on consumer attitudes relates to the degree of empathy that the participants express towards other easterners. In the first section of this chapter, analysis showed that the participants were empathic towards economically underprivileged easterners, despite the fact they distanced themselves from the group. The extracts looked at in this section, however, show a far lower degree of empathy. The participants appear to feel frustrated and

irritated about the apparent failure of this group to take a more sophisticated approach to shopping. This tendency can perhaps be explained by the different degrees of control that individuals have over their economic circumstances and their attitudes – it is more difficult to change your economic circumstances than to alter your attitudes. It may also reflect the participants' desire to be disassociated with such behaviours – the more they criticise them, the less likely they are to be linked to them. Furthermore, by criticising them they are conforming to mainstream perceptions of the east in unified Germany, and therefore perhaps securing their place as 'Germans' rather than east Germans.

The participants' critical views of other easterners also show that their perceptions of a 'good consumer' have been shaped by western ideas, and therefore the resonance of western ideals in their identity processes. For example, Max contextualised his image of the unsophisticated and inelegant eastern consumer by describing western consumers as 'civilised'. His criticism of eastern consumers therefore seems to have been fuelled by the idea that 'good consumers' should not wear high-trend, throwaway clothes, but engage in more 'civilised' shopping as westerners do. Similarly, Julia's dismay at her parents' preference for low-budget shops and ignorance about designer labels comes from the perception that a 'good consumer' buys high quality and expensive goods. These were characteristics which the participants most commonly associated with western consumers. It seems, therefore, that the participants' inability to adopt a more empathic view of eastern consumers has been shaped by the resonance of western principles.

### *Ostalgie*

During the interviews, *Ostalgie* emerged as a discourse which plays a formative role in the participants' identity processes. This section focuses on this stereotype, and how the participants engaged with it in the construction of their own east Germanness and that of other easterners. It should be noted here that, unlike the other popular perceptions explored in this chapter, *Ostalgie* is referred to as a

stereotype. It is useful to provide a definition of this concept, and explain why it is appropriate for *Ostalgie* before beginning the main analysis for this section. The term ‘stereotype’ was first coined by Walter Lippmann in 1922. In a new introduction to Lippmann’s work, Michael Curtis describes stereotypes as:

Images, categorizations, or generalizations taking a particular view of, or emphasizing or exaggerating traits or characteristics or behavior patterns that have been assigned to individuals or groups with a degree of regularity (1998, p. xxiv).

The explanation of *Ostalgie* in the literature review shows how the discourse acts as a stereotype.<sup>56</sup> The term conjures up a range of images and discourses which relate in particular to wistful attachments to the GDR and a backward-looking approach to unified Germany. Importantly, these images are said to dominate when it comes to understanding positive perceptions of the east in unified Germany, which means, in line with Curtis’s definition, they are ‘assigned [...] with a degree of regularity’. The reason that *Ostalgie* fits this description and that other perceptions addressed here do not is that it is considered to be one of the most common terms to be associated with the east. The problem is that, as can be seen from its connotations, it presents east Germanness in a largely negative light. This poses difficulties for easterners in contemporary Germany because, as Curtis points out, ‘people react to stereotypes rather than to the object itself’ (ibid). The influence that this stereotype has over the participants’ self perceptions and their understandings of others are the subject of this section.

During the interviews, seventeen of the twenty participants used the term without my prompting, usually with reference to GDR objects or products. Only three of these participants engaged with the term in the first part of the interview, when they were discussing how their personal experiences of the GDR, childhood memories and family traditions compared to their experiences in unified Germany. For the other fourteen interviewees, the trigger for the term

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<sup>56</sup> The section on *Ostalgie* on pp. 29-32 provides a full explanation of the apparent prevalence and the connotations of the discourse, which are referred to throughout this section.

was more generic GDR references, that is to say symbols that are widely associated with the east, often *Ostprodukte*, as opposed to personal memories which only applied to the interviewee in question. The point where the term was most commonly used was without doubt when I gave the participants the *Knusperflocken* and *Ampelmann* sweets, which overwhelmingly elicited an animated response, encouraging them to talk warmly about these familiar objects from their past. However, although almost all participants reacted enthusiastically to the sweets, all but two of them engaged with the term *Ostalgie* defensively and distanced themselves from its negative characteristics. Of the three popular conceptions of east Germanness explored in this chapter, *Ostalgie* showed itself to be the most influential and subsequently the most likely to provoke resistance among the participants.

The first part of this section explores how the participants characterised the group that they labelled as *ostalgie*. Close reading of their narratives reveals that their perceptions correspond largely to the stereotypical image of the easterner which is conjured up by the term *Ostalgie*, so, that they accept the term when it comes to others. It also demonstrates that the participants are highly critical of *ostalgie* easterners and provided detailed responses to ensure that they were not associated with the discourse. The second part of the section examines the role of *Ostalgie* in perceptions of the self, revealing that these participants overwhelmingly reject *Ostalgie* by conceptualising their own attachment to the past as 'normal'. An important finding, however, is that the participants do express politicised attachments to the GDR elsewhere in their interviews. These perceptions do not, however, come through in discussions about *Ostalgie*. Although the participants are able to negotiate the stereotype in order to express depoliticised attachments to the GDR, the discourse appears to mask their politicised attachments. It seems that they do not raise these in the context of *Ostalgie* for fear of them being misconstrued as more extreme political leanings. The final part of this section compares the ways that the participants understand their attachments to the past and how they perceive those of other easterners.

There are striking differences here; while they reject the stereotype in their own understandings, they are convinced that *ostalgic* easterners exist.

### *Ostalgie* and perceptions of others

Before moving on to look more closely at how the participants characterise *ostalgic* easterners in their narratives, it is useful to provide a brief explanation about the way in which they labelled the group in question. The participants often referred to the subgroup that they created in their narratives as *Ossis*. They made a clear distinction between an *Ossi* and an *Ostdeutscher*, presenting *Ossis* as stereotypically *ostalgic* and *Ostdeutsche* simply as people born in the east. Much of this section, therefore, deals with the participants' perceptions of *Ossis*, as well as how their understandings correspond to *Ostalgie*.

The participants' descriptions of *ostalgic* easterners were very similar; they all criticised them for being backward-looking and glorifying the GDR. The following extract, which is taken from Christian's interview, is typical of the participants' descriptions of *ostalgic* easterners:

Es gibt auch viele Leute, die sind ostalgisch, und das ist ja wirklich hinderlich für ihr Leben, weil sie sich ja einfach bei den...nur noch, ich sage mal, in so einer Rückwärtsgewandtheit leben.

(There are also lots of people who are *ostalgic*, and it's really obstructive for their lives because they simply...still, I mean, kind of live in a backward mentality.)

What is striking about this extract is how closely Christian's definition of *Ostalgie* corresponds to the widespread connotations of the discourse. The use of the term 'obstructive' and 'backward mentality' relate directly to the popular perception that *Ostalgie* signifies being stuck in the past and imply that such attachments to the past are something which should be remedied.

Reading the accounts of *Ostalgie* in the interviews also revealed that, of the three sets of perceptions that have been analysed in this chapter, the participants are the least empathetic towards *ostalgic* easterners. This sentiment comes through

more clearly in the following extract, where Christian is explaining how he believes *Ossis* have responded to unification:

So wehleidig und die guten alten Zeiten und mmm und guck mal und ach Mensch...so. So ein Stück weit von der Ansicht..ah..so vergangenheitsfixiert. Das ist was, wo ich sagen würde, das ist ein Ossi. Also wir haben jetzt eine neue Situation, mit der er nicht klarkommt. Und wenn wir mit dieser neuen Situation unzufrieden sind, dann müssen wir es angucken, womit sind wir unzufrieden, und dann müssen wir was tun, um diese Situation besser zu machen.

(Whiney somehow and the good old times and mmm and you see and it's not fair...like that. Sort of a way away from the outlook..um..sort of fixated on the past. That's something, where I'd say, that's an *Ossi*. I mean, now we have a new situation, that he isn't getting to grips with. And if we're unhappy with this new situation, then we have to look at it, and what we are unhappy with, and then we have to do something to make the situation better.)

Christian's frustration is immediately clear from the tone that he uses to parody *ostalgic* easterners, suggesting that they mistakenly view the GDR as 'the good old times'. In his imitation, he uses the phrase 'it's not fair', which is generally associated with childish complaining, and thus emphasises that he considers *Ostalgie* to be a puerile mentality. He goes on to explain why he is so critical of these easterners, claiming they should be more proactive in changing unified Germany – he can see no point in complaining about the situation if you are not prepared to take action to improve it. There is no evidence of empathy towards the group in question for their apparent inability to settle in unified Germany.

The participants' narratives also corresponded to the mainstream idea that *Ostalgie* is akin to glorifying the past:

Ostalgie, also diesen Begriff verbinde ich auch mit vielem Negativen. Also [...] es gibt sehr viele Leute, auch gerade aus der alten DDR, die sagen, ja, in der DDR, da war nicht alles schlecht und es gab viele Sachen, also wir hatten damals immer Arbeit und hatten halt immer was zu essen und da war das Zusammenleben einfacher und da wird halt, das Positive wird nach oben gekehrt und das Negative wird halt vollkommen weggewischt...das ist halt eine Verklärung, also Ostalgie.

(*Ostalgie*, well I associate this term with a lot of negatives. You see, there are an awful lot of people, who also come from the former GDR, who say, yeah in the GDR, it wasn't all bad and there were lots of things, back then we all had work and there was always something to eat and social togetherness was easier, and then everything is, the positives are pushed to the forefront and the negatives are completely brushed aside...it's like a glorification, this *Ostalgie*.)

Like all of the participants in this group when they discussed the glorification of the GDR, Daniel became increasingly infuriated in his narrative. When he imitated the easterners who he claims glorify the past, he adopted a sarcastic tone of voice and rolled his eyes, suggesting that he has little patience with what he considers to be a rather ignorant view of the GDR. Like Christian, Daniel expresses no empathy for this subgroup of easterners, implying that they hold a degree responsibility for having, in his view, an unsuitable attachment to the past.

The use of the third person in these statements also demonstrates that, while the participants believe that there are easterners who fit into this stereotype, they do not include themselves in this group. Their distance from *Ostalgie* is emphasised further by the profound degree of frustration and criticism that they target at this group – they do not empathise with these easterners, and certainly do not identify with them. The participants here also disassociated themselves from *Ostalgie* by restricting these attitudes to a subgroup of easterners to which they did not belong. just as they did when discussing consumer attitudes. For example, when I asked Daniel if he could explain why some easterners were *ostalgic*, he said:

Also auf die Generation meiner Eltern hat diese Ostalgie natürlich auch noch eine Auswirkung, weil das so gewisse Maßstäbe sind, an die sie sich immer noch halten.

(I mean, *Ostalgie* obviously still has an effect on my parents' generation because there are certain GDR standards, which they still keep holding onto).



With this comment, Daniel creates a subgroup comprising only those born in the 1950s, which means that he, as someone born in the 1970s, is not a member. His exasperated tone then further emphasises his distance when he explains that this generation ‘still keeps holding onto’ GDR standards. The participants generally tended to show a higher level of contempt towards supposedly *ostalgic* easterners than towards ‘eastern’ consumers. This tendency can also be seen in the following extract from Franziska’s interview, where she uses geographical location to create a subgroup of *ostalgic* easterners:

Ich meine, es gibt ja noch manche Orte im Osten, wo man denkt, da ist die Wende noch nicht angekommen oder so, um denen mal zu sagen, hee, hallo!

(I mean, there are still some places in the east, where you think that the *Wende* hasn’t arrived yet or something, you want to say to them, uh, hello!)

Franziska exaggeratedly describes some eastern regions as places ‘where you think that the *Wende* hasn’t arrived’, and adopts a mocking tone when telling the story. She makes it clear that, as a Berliner, she firmly separates her own understandings from those of easterners outside of Berlin. By claiming with dismay that ‘you want to say to them, uh, hello’, as though she considers them to be out of touch with reality, she makes it clear that she not only disassociates herself from this group, but is also very critical of them.

The participants critical views of *Ostalgie* suggests that, like their perceptions of economic circumstances and consumer attitudes, they are framed primarily by western norms. Their understandings of the terms *Ossi* and *Ostalgie* demonstrate that they are based on the view that identifying with unified Germany is akin to identifying with the western system. Claudia states:

Diese Ossis, die sich wirklich dann total daneben benehmen, die sich wirklich so anmerken lassen, dass sie mit den westlichen Dingen nichts zu tun haben wollen.

(These *Ossis*, who really don’t play the game, who make it really clear that they don’t want anything to do with western things.)

Claudia's view suggests that she considers, and is indeed content, that the unification of Germany entails the implementation of the western system in the east. Her use of 'western things' as a synonym for unified Germany make it clear that she understands norms in unified Germany to amount to western norms. This corresponds with the arguments outlined in the section on academic understandings of *Ostalgie* that the persistence of eastern identities detracts from identification with the west, which should be the dominant force in German unity.<sup>57</sup> It seems that, while the participants by no means reject east Germanness, they do renounce aspects of it which they deem to be at odds with western norms.

#### *Ostalgie* and perceptions of the self

When discussing their own attachments to the GDR past, all of the participants in this group consistently normalised their sentiments, thus distancing them from their conceptions of *Ostalgie*. Of the three sets of popular ideas of east Germanness looked at in this chapter, it was clear that the participants were most keen to disassociate themselves from *Ostalgie*. When explaining the importance of the past, they made direct reference to the *ostalgic* stereotype so as to make it clear that their sentiments were not to be confused with *Ostalgie*, as exemplified by Christian:

Meine ostdeutsche Vergangenheit ist schon wichtig für mich, aber jetzt nun wiederum nicht so wichtig, dass ich jetzt in so eine *Ostalgie* verfallen würde.

(My east German past is certainly important for me, but then on the other hand, it is not so important that I would lapse into some kind of *Ostalgie*.)

That Christian considers it necessary to justify his attachments to his east German past by explicitly disassociating it with *Ostalgie* demonstrates that the discourse plays an influential role, and may also suggest that his sentiments have been

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<sup>57</sup> These perceptions are most common among the scholars who perceive east German identity as a problem for German unity, such as Gensicke (1995, 1998), Goll and Leurer (2004) and Thomas (2000). See pp. 39-43.

misconstrued by it in past experiences. His reference to *Ostalgie* without my prompting indicates that the term is one of the first to come to mind when the GDR past is the subject of discussion, despite the fact that it does not accurately describe the form of attachment that Christian is explaining. The vocabulary he uses also makes clear that he is keen to not be viewed as *ostaltig*. The verb 'verfallen' (translated as 'lapse') holds negative connotations in German, conjuring up images of moving backwards or deterioration. For Christian then, *Ostalgie* does not fit his understandings, and what is more, threatens to distort his east Germanness, portraying it as a backward-looking and problematic identification.

Other participants did not explicitly distance themselves from the term *Ostalgie*, but instead altered its connotations by likening it to western nostalgia. Lina, for example, constructs her narrative to portray *Ostalgie* as a relatively moderate form of nostalgia:

Es hat eine Verbindung mit meiner Kindheit. Meine Kindheit war in der DDR und ich glaube, viele Menschen sind in gewisser Weise nostalgisch veranlagt. Also merke ich dann extrem an meinen westdeutschen Freunden und Kollegen, dass die dann sagen, ach Mensch, weißt du noch diese Brause Bonbons von dadada oder so. Und dann...ah...ich glaube, das ist das, das ist die Kindheit. [...] Aber die Ostalgie, dieses hah und Osten und da gab es das, das ist einfach Nostalgie, weil es die Kindheit und die Jugend war und das hat jeder auf der Welt, wenn er eine schöne Kindheit.

(It has a link with my childhood. My childhood was in the GDR and I think many people are in some way nostalgically minded. I mean, I notice it extremely with my west German friends and colleagues when they say, hey, do you remember those Brause sweets from such and such or something. And then...um...I think that's it, that's childhood. [...] But this *Ostalgie*, this aahh, the east, and there used to be this, it's simply nostalgia, because it was childhood and youth, and everyone in the world has that if they had a nice childhood.)

Lina is keen to point out that, although she identifies with *Ostalgie*, her own identifications with the GDR are not unusual, but an acceptable form of remembering. By stressing the intensity of west German nostalgia through her use of the word 'extrem', she removes the peculiarity of *Ostalgie*, and even makes

it appear less intense than some forms of nostalgia in the west. As with the other understandings of *Ostalgie* among this group, this definition relates only to private or personal memories and makes no connection with socialism or the state. This is illustrated by the repetitive use of 'Kindheit' (childhood) and also 'persönliche Erinnerungen' (personal memories), both of which appear frequently throughout all of the interviews.

The ways that the participants engage with *Ostalgie* when discussing their own attachments to the past also shed light on some of the possible reasons that they are so keen to distance themselves from it, or at least from its connotations. The following extract is taken from a section of Stefan's interview where we were discussing *Ostalgie*, specifically with reference to east German products:

Das ist so eine Nuss-Nougat-Kreme so wie Nutella, ja, gab es in den Läden und das ist ein Geschmack, den habe ich eben noch aus der DDR diese Erinnerung und das hat mir damals geschmeckt und das ist einfach so ein Stück unbekümmerte Kindheit, die so hier oben so ein bisschen wachruft. Von daher...es schmeckt auch ein bisschen anders als Nutella...ich esse auch Nutella. [...] Keine Politik.

(It's a kind of nut-nougat spread like *Nutella*, yeah, it used to be in the shops, I still have this memory from the GDR and I liked it back then and it's simply an example of a carefree childhood that evokes something up here. From back then...it also tastes a bit different to *Nutella*...I also eat *Nutella*. [...] No politics.)

From the outset, Stefan constructs his narrative to ensure that his decision to purchase east German chocolate spread is not misinterpreted as an *ostalgic* attachment to the past. By linking it to childhood memories, he is firmly separating his sentiments from those of the *ostalgic* subgroup, who, as demonstrated above, are considered to hold a more politicised attachment to the GDR. He goes on to qualify his product choice, explaining that he also buys west German chocolate spread, as if to clarify that his decision to purchase east German chocolate spread should not be read as a rejection of the west. Stefan expresses the depoliticised nature of his attachment to this GDR product most clearly at the end of his account, where he explicitly states that it is not political.

His rather long-winded clarification that his fond memories of a chocolate spread should not be misconstrued as a political view in a discussion that, on the face of it, appears simply to be about everyday childhood experiences, is very telling. As a result of the negative and often politicised connotations of *Ostalgie*, the participants continuously clarify and justify their sentiments in an attempt to prevent them from being misunderstood as a politicised attachment to the GDR or a backward looking form of remembering.

### A politicised east Germanness?

Although the participants emphasised their depoliticised attachments to the GDR in discussions about *Ostalgie*, they did express politicised identifications elsewhere in the interview. The participants identified a number of the socio-political structures from the GDR as being better than those in unified Germany. They were highly critical of the influential role that the SED played in individuals' everyday lives. However, they claimed that the GDR offered a higher standard of state provisions and that there was more social equality under socialism.<sup>58</sup> There are clear tensions between this finding and the narratives analysed so far in this section, where the participants go to great lengths to distance themselves from the political connotations *Ostalgie*. The participants made no reference to the socio-political aspects of the GDR when talking about *Ostalgie*. In fact, at times they went as far as explicitly stating that their sentiments were not political, even when they were discussing themes that held no politicised connotations whatsoever. The point here is that the participants do indeed have politicised attachments to the GDR. These did not, however, come to light when the participants discussed *Ostalgie*, the discourse which most commonly refers to the GDR everyday in unified Germany. In these discussions, it appeared that the participants avoided expressing politicised attachments for fear that they would be misconstrued as being stuck in the past or showing an

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<sup>58</sup> These findings correspond more closely to the ways that the participants perceive the GDR in the context of unified Germany. Therefore, they are analysed in full in the final chapter of the thesis on pp. 246-255.

overall preference for socialism. It seems that they did not feel that the nuances of their politicised identifications would come through in the face of the problematic connotations of *Ostalgie* which pigeonhole easterners as backward-looking and anti-capitalist. This finding, then, provides more in-depth insights into the role of *Ostalgie* in perceptions of east Germanness. When it comes to self-presentation, the participants negotiate the discourse and express their depoliticised attachments to the GDR. However, the problematic political connotations of the discourse appear to prevent the participants from discussing their politicised identifications.

During the interviews, several participants actually explicitly problematised *Ostalgie*, explaining it as an unclear term which potentially distorted their understandings. For example, Marie claimed that:

Es ist in dem Sinne kein guter Begriff, weil man mit dem Begriff nicht unterscheiden kann, ob es jemand ist, der die Mauer zurück haben will, oder jemand ist, der sozusagen, wie ich eben erklärt habe, sich auch normal an seine Kindheit und so weiter erinnern will in einem positiven Sinne, ja. Dieser Begriff lässt alles offen, deshalb muss man zu dem Begriff immer noch hinterherschieben, nachsagen, aber die Mauer möchte ich nicht zurück und auch nicht die DDR. Oder ist es sozusagen ein etwas schwammiger unkonkreter Begriff.

(In that way it's not a good term because it doesn't differentiate between people who want the Wall back and people who, like I just said, want to remember their childhood and things in a normal way, in a positive way, yeah. The term leaves everything open, so after the term you always need to explain, to say afterwards, actually I don't want the Wall back, or the GDR either. Otherwise it's a bit of a malleable, unconcrete term.)

Marie's explanation of *Ostalgie* suggests that the term holds multiple meanings – it can be used to refer to easterners who wish for the return of the Wall as well as those who simply want to remember their childhoods in the GDR. This lack of definition evidently presents a problem in itself. As Marie points out, the term always requires additional explanation to ensure the speaker's intended message is not misunderstood. What is particularly striking here, however, is the lack of nuance in Marie's definition. She indicates that *Ostalgie* has two main meanings –

a politicised one and a depoliticised one. She makes no mention of the different types of politicised attachments to the GDR which, given the findings of the interviews, make up east Germanness. In her definition, Marie only remarks upon the most extreme type of politicised attachment – a desire for the return of socialism. Importantly, this is the politicised attachment which is most commonly associated with east Germanness in popular discourse.

Other participants who problematised *Ostalgie* were more precise in their criticism:

Ich glaube, was oftmals fehlinterpretiert wird, ist wenn man sagt, dass das, was besser war, man kann ja objektiv einfach sagen, das war besser. Und sobald man heutzutage sagt, man, ja, die Kinderkrippen waren aber super...also wir haben die zwei Systeme erlebt.

(I think something that is often misinterpreted is when people say that things that were better, I mean, people can objectively say, that was better. And now, as soon you say, wow, yeah, childcare was really great...I mean, we've experienced two systems.)

Elisabeth explicitly explains that she struggles to express her opinion that some of the socio-political features of the GDR were better in the face of perceptions that any politicised attachment is akin to a problematic identification with socialism as a whole. The pause in her narrative is very telling – she makes it clear that politicised conceptions are often met with scepticism, but hesitates in explicitly explaining the way that they are misconstrued. This suggests that she feels disillusioned by how difficult it is to communicate more nuanced politicised attachments to the GDR. For Elisabeth, her experiences of the GDR and unified Germany put her in a good position to construct informed opinions about the benefits and drawbacks of each system. The power of *ostalgic* discourse, however, makes it difficult for these views to be heard and understood in unified Germany. In the participants eyes, therefore, the benefits that they perceive they have as easterners are not only unappreciated, but risk being misrepresented as problematic identifications with socialism.

### *Ostalgie*, the self and others

The final point to be made in this section relates to the considerable difference between the participants' perceptions of their own attachments to the past and the way that they conceptualise those of others. Despite the fact that they reject *Ostalgie* out of hand when it comes to their own understandings, three quarters of the participants drew heavily on the discourse of *Ostalgie* to describe other easterners. In fact, analysis of the interviews shows that the participants claim to have no personal contacts who match up to this typecast, but are nonetheless convinced that the group does exist. For example, when referring to easterners who wished for a return to the GDR, Lina stated: 'Also, das gibt es bestimmt, aber ich kenne niemanden' (Well, they certainly exist, but I don't know anyone). This finding reveals a key difference between *ostalgic* stereotypes and popular ideas about eastern consumers – when telling their anecdotes about other easterners' consumer attitudes, the participants only referred to people with whom they have personal contact. This observation is significant to understanding the influence of the different discourses. With *Ostalgie*, the participants' personal experiences are overridden by overarching discourse in their understandings of other easterners. Their expectations about other easterners' consumer attitudes are also close to the stereotypes, but these do seem to have been confirmed to the participants by their personal experiences. The certainty that the *ostalgic* stereotype is a reality, despite the fact that participants have never come across anyone who fits into it, illustrates how greatly *Ostalgie* has influenced perceptions of east Germanness. Although some participants redefined and normalised the discourse to better match their own depoliticised understandings, its widespread connotations prevail in the way that they conceive easterners more generally. This, again, lends weight to the idea that *Ostalgie* misconstrues and overshadows alternative understandings of east Germanness.



## Conclusion

This chapter has explored how the participants respond to negative popular ideas about east Germanness in their own identity processes and when understanding other easterners. It has shown that they challenge the simplicity of the label 'east German' by providing detailed explanations which redefine it as a more complex and differentiated cultural identity. Breaking down different popular understandings of east Germanness and looking at them individually has shown that they play different roles in the participants' perceptions. The participants' narratives became increasingly complex as they moved from talking about relatively demonstrable social markers to more subjective perceptions. This shows that their concern about being misunderstood grows when the popular ideas that they are dealing with become more subjective.

When discussing economic circumstances, which seem to be considered more demonstrable, they did indeed hold a concrete idea of east and west Germanness. However, in comparison to the other sets of perceptions, they expressed a high degree of empathy towards underprivileged easterners and only implicitly distanced themselves from the group. Their empathy decreased when they talked about distinctive eastern consumer attitudes, which are based on subjective perceptions. Their understandings here corresponded largely to popular images, but the participants only engaged with these to describe those with whom they have personal contact, rather than a generic group of easterners. When expressing distance from this group, their narratives were markedly more complex and explicit than those about economic circumstances. This indicates a stronger desire to be disassociated from unfavourable ideas about distinctive eastern consumer attitudes. It was in discussions about *ostalgic* easterners that the participants expressed the least empathy, making it clear that they found such a mentality to be very problematic. The images that they constructed in their narratives matched those presented by the stereotype, and most importantly frequently overrode their own understandings in the way that they perceived easterners whom they had never met. They went to great lengths to ensure that their own attachments to the past were not misconstrued by *Ostalgie*, providing

by far the most complex narratives. *Ostalgie* thus emerged as being the most problematic popular perception of east Germanness. It does not match the participants' understandings, yet they are so worried that they will be misconstrued by it that they justify their feelings in relation to it. They are able to negotiate the stereotype to express depoliticised attachments to the past, but seem to avoid discussing their politicised understandings for fear that they will be misunderstood as more extreme political leanings. Moreover, it plays a significant role in determining how they perceive other easterners – the gap between their self-perceptions and those of others again lends strength to the argument that *Ostalgie* misrepresents east Germanness.

The most consistent finding to come from this analysis is perhaps that popular ideas of east Germanness have a considerable influence over the way that the participants perceive other easterners. These images resonated even though they did not correspond to their own understandings, or, in the case of *Ostalgie*, to those of anyone that they had met. The participants often uncritically bought into these perceptions, overlooking the likelihood of differentiation and showing a lack of understanding for those they believe fit these ideas. In this sense, their notions of east Germanness are very much driven by the dominant German discourses which form the basis of negative conceptions of east Germanness. Western ideals dominated in the construction of their perceptions of others, and also in the way that they constructed their own east Germanness. Their idea of a 'good' consumer prioritised western sophistication and quality and brand awareness over eastern frugality – these attributes drove their criticism of 'eastern' consumers as well as their self-presentation as 'westernised' consumers. When discussing *Ostalgie*, they emphatically rejected and problematised attachments to the GDR which were considered to go against western norms, and normalised their own identifications with the past by likening them to western nostalgia. By criticising easterners who are perceived to fit into the stereotypes, the participants are working within the norms of the dominant discourse in unified Germany. In this sense, then, they may be distancing themselves from the east in order to identify themselves as 'German'. This does not mean that they

reject their east Germanness – the participants identify with their eastern backgrounds. What they do, however, is redefine their east Germanness so that it is more fitting in the context of unified Germany.

## Chapter Six

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### **Growing up through unification: East Germanness as a part of Germanness**

The idea of a collective east German cultural identity has been pivotal in existing research explaining post-unification east Germanness. The term alludes to a distinctive set of values or characteristics which are exclusive to and shared by all easterners. There is little doubt that a collective eastern identity is an important aspect of the participants' identity processes, all of whom identified with some form of common eastern identity. Their narratives revealed, however, that the idea of a collective identity alone is too narrow to thoroughly explain the participants' east Germanness. In addition they identified with a set of distinctive 'western' consumer characteristics, as well as a set of values which they claim are exclusive to easterners born in the 1970s. This chapter focuses on the different positive identifications that the participants incorporate into their east Germanness. Taken alongside the values and characteristics from which they distance themselves, which were analysed in the previous chapter, they provide an overall picture of the participants' self-perceptions, and, importantly, how these fit into their ideas of Germanness.

The main body of this chapter is structured according to the groups with which the participants positively identified in their identity processes. The first section focuses on the idea of a collective eastern identity. In existing literature, this is often associated with values linking to a sense of community, such as togetherness and the tendency to prioritise personal relationships.<sup>59</sup> The interviews did indeed substantiate this definition, but they also developed it to provide deeper insights into the specific features which, according to the participants, make up collective east Germanness. Looking at these characteristics in more detail reveals how they interact in eastern identity processes, and why

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<sup>59</sup> These attributes are frequently said to stem from the mutual dependence and social solidarity which were important aspects of everyday life in the GDR. The majority of existing research focuses on the idea of the east as a collective, as explained on pp. 25-38.

the participants perceive them to be a benefit in unified Germany. It also demonstrates how the participants compare the east and west in their narratives about a collective east Germanness, which sheds further light on the concepts of the *Trotzidentität* and *Ossi-pride*.

Importantly, however, the participants also identified with a set of characteristics which are generally associated with west Germany in their identity processes.<sup>60</sup> These findings are the subject of the second section, which shows how the participants implicitly break down the characteristics often associated with generic categories of east and west in order to form an east Germanness which fits with their own understandings. This section also provides insights into perceptions of consumption, which have shown themselves to be formative in the participants' identity processes. The label '1970s generation easterners' is crucial in these processes, as it enables the participants to hold onto their east Germanness, but construct a form of it which better fits their conceptions, and importantly, into the context of unified Germany.

Perceptions about the 1970s generation are also the subject of the third section, which explores how the participants conceptualise their generation as a unique group in unified Germany. The idea of the 1970s generation as a distinctive east German group is new to research in this field. Correspondingly, the findings relating to how the participants constructed this group provide a fresh perspective on eastern identity processes. They show why and how the participants perceive themselves to have experiences which put them in a better position than westerners and older generations of easterners in contemporary Germany.

The fourth section brings all of these identifications together to build a fuller picture of how the participants define themselves. This reveals the ways in which the participants' self-perceptions fit quite neatly into the western context of unified Germany. It highlights that the participants make use of the label '1970s

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<sup>60</sup> It should be noted that the participants themselves did not use the term 'west German' in their narratives – I have used this label to refer to the characteristics which are commonly associated with the west in contemporary Germany.

generation easterner' first to hold onto a sense of east Germanness, and second to redefine the meaning of 'east German' to better fit to their own conceptions and to the norms and values in unified Germany.

### **Identifications with the east: A more socially engaged group**

The analysis here is divided into two sections; the first focuses on understandings of community engagement and the second on perceptions of personal relationships. Each section explains the specific characteristics that the participants associated with a collective east Germanness, and how they positioned themselves in relation to them. They also explore how the participants perceive these characteristics to impact upon their lives in unified Germany, so how they benefit from having such attributes. It was particularly striking that the participants consistently constructed a collective east German identity in opposition to the west. Exploring the participants' constructions of east Germanness in relation to the west provides some more nuanced insights into the existing debates about a *zweite-Klasse-Mentalität*, *Trotzidentität* and sense of *Ossi-pride*.

An important finding to emerge from the participants' narratives was that they associate a range of positive characteristics with the east as a whole and, more importantly, include them in their own east Germanness. Particularly striking here was that the majority of the participants identified the same sets of characteristics in their narratives. All twenty identified a collective east Germanness, claiming that easterners are more socially engaged than westerners. Three-quarters of them specified that easterners have a stronger sense of community and tend to prioritise their personal relationships over their careers.

#### Community engagement

The positive characteristic most commonly associated with a collective east Germanness by the participants was having a strong sense of community and

consequently showing a high level of social engagement. All of the twenty participants suggested that this is a feature which applies homogenously to the eastern population and included themselves in this bracket. They perceive these values to have been learned through socialisation in the GDR. In their eyes, they continue to play a role today and, importantly, constitute a benefit in the context of unified Germany which westerners do not have.

The following extracts are typical of the accounts that the participants gave regarding a sense of community. When I asked Franziska if and how her GDR experiences had an impact on her life today, the first feature which came to her was:

Dass man halt [long pause]...was hat mein Leben geprägt? Also alle zusammen und so, Gemeinschaft und so, dieses Zusammensein.

(That you [long pause]...what has affected my life? I mean, everyone together and that, community and things, this togetherness.)

For Franziska, then, it is clear that she associates a sense of togetherness with her upbringing in the east. In comparison to the other participants, she is rather vague about what she means by togetherness and community, as illustrated by the pauses in her narrative and the use of 'and that' and 'and things'. Nonetheless, given that this is the first characteristic that comes to Franziska's mind when she is asked how her GDR experiences affected her, she evidently has a firm, if intuitive, idea that easterners have a strong sense of togetherness. In the following extract, Anna is more precise in her claim the east has a strong sense of community:

Also im Osten ist auch, was fällt mir gerade noch ein..also, sich gegenseitig zu helfen ist nach wie vor was ganz Wichtiges.

(I mean, in the east it's also, something else that's just occurred to me..helping each other is really important, just like it was before.)

Like Franziska, Anna considers this sense of community to stem from the GDR, as shown by the comment at the end of her account that it is 'just like it was

before'. She describes this value more explicitly as a tendency to help those around you. This was the most frequent understanding of community in the participants' narratives – although not all of them referred specifically to helping, all but two of them spoke of mutual dependence, either in the form of helping, supporting, or caring. In his interview, Daniel neatly summed up this idea:

[...] der Wille zu einem Gemeinschaftsdenken. Also gegenseitiges Vertrauen spielt eine ganz große Rolle.

([...] the trust in a sense of community. I mean, mutual trust plays a really big role.)

His use of the term 'mutual trust' is very helpful, as it serves as an overarching definition for what all of the participants allude to in their narratives about a sense of community. The point is that they are more mindful of others, and believe that this mindset constitutes a commonality among easterners. This means that they, in turn, feel that they would be better supported by fellow easterners than they would be by westerners. The word 'trust' also appertains to a further feature of the participants' conceptions of a sense of community. For the participants, such social engagement is not perceived as an obligation or bother, but a congenial aspect of social interaction which they rely on and thus wish to be a part of.

A possible reason that the participants wish to adopt a social role where they offer support to others is the rewards that they reap in return. Fourteen of the participants gave more detailed narratives about a sense of community than the other six, outlining how it benefits their lives. For example, Sonja explained that:

Dieses Gemeinschaftsgefühl, dass man mehr nach dem anderen guckt. Das ist der größte Unterschied, den ich zwischen meinem Mann und mir feststelle mit der Familie, dass wir ein sehr viel unkomplizierteren Umgang innerhalb der Familie haben, als es in der Familie meines Mannes ist.

(This sense of community, that you look out for others more. That is the biggest difference that I see between my husband and myself when it comes to family, that we have far more uncomplicated relationships within the family than my husband has in his family.)



Sonja explains the way that her sense of community influences the relationships that she has with her family, claiming that her own familial relations are much less complicated than those of her husband, who is west German. What is important here is that Sonja believes that she enjoys more amicable relationships *because* she has a stronger sense of community. She is therefore rewarded by being more socially engaged, a trait which, importantly, she claims to have learned through her upbringing in the GDR rather than as an east German in unified Germany.

### Personal relationships and career

A further positive characteristic that the majority of the participants claimed to be a part of a collective east Germanness related to personal relationships. Of the twenty participants, seventeen claimed that, conversely to westerners, easterners prioritise their friends and family over their careers. The construction of their narratives suggest that the participants consider these values to be entwined with a sense of community: it is because they have a stronger sense of community that they place more importance on friends and family. Max claimed, for example:

Ich glaube, die neuen Bundeslandbürger sind...uh...sind...warmherziger, mehr auf Familie und Freundschaft. Ich glaube, in den alten Bundesländer ist schon mehr ich, nur auf die Karriere bezogen.

(I think people in the new *Länder* are...um...are...more warm-hearted, more about family and friends. I think in the old *Länder* it's more about me, only focused on career.)

Reading the beginning of this extract, it would not be unreasonable to assume that Max is discussing a sense of community, rather than the role he perceives friends and family and career to play in his life. His use of the term 'warm-hearted', followed by the emphasis he places on family and friends, relates directly to the features that the participants associate with a sense of community. They correspond to the friendliness and approachability that are inherent to the mutual dependence outlined above. The rest of his account makes clear,

however, that he is not talking about community spirit, but what different people prioritise in life. According to Max, some prioritise other people, while others focus on themselves and progressing in their career.

A further point to be drawn from the above extracts relates to the comparison that Sonja and Max make between the east and west in their narratives. It should be noted that I did not ask either participant to differentiate between the east and west, but to talk about how their GDR experiences have shaped their lives in unified Germany. Nonetheless, they refer to the west as an other to explain their heightened sense of community, which means they are constructing a collective eastern identity in opposition to the west. This does not mean, however, that their understandings of east Germanness are entirely predicated by their post-unification experiences of the west, or of how the west perceives the east in unified Germany. The values which the participants link to a sense of collective east Germanness correspond closely to the socialist ideas of social solidarity which existed in the GDR. These socialist values were indeed defined against the west at the time of the GDR, so, in this sense, the participants' perceptions of the east are formulated in opposition to the west. Their focus on socialisation, however, suggests that their identities may be rooted in their GDR upbringings, rather than in their post-unification experiences. Furthermore, there is no sign of *Trotz* (defiance) in their narratives, which scholars often claim is a formative feature of post-unification east Germanness. As was explained in the literature review, researchers such as Chris Flockton (1999) Patricia Hogwood (2000) and Gordon Charles Ross (2002) suggest that eastern identities have been constructed in the shadow of the west, and therefore can be characterised as a defiant response to the idea of western superiority.<sup>61</sup> Although the participants use the west as a point of comparison when discussing eastern positive attributes, they do not present themselves as victims of inferiority in their narratives. Hogwood's idea of *Ossi-pride* presents itself as a more fitting concept for these participants. She describes this as a process by which, 'easterners have adapted their *Ossi* tag

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<sup>61</sup> The debates about the *zweite-Klasse-Mentalität* and subsequent *Trotzidentität* are outlined in full on pp. 34-36.

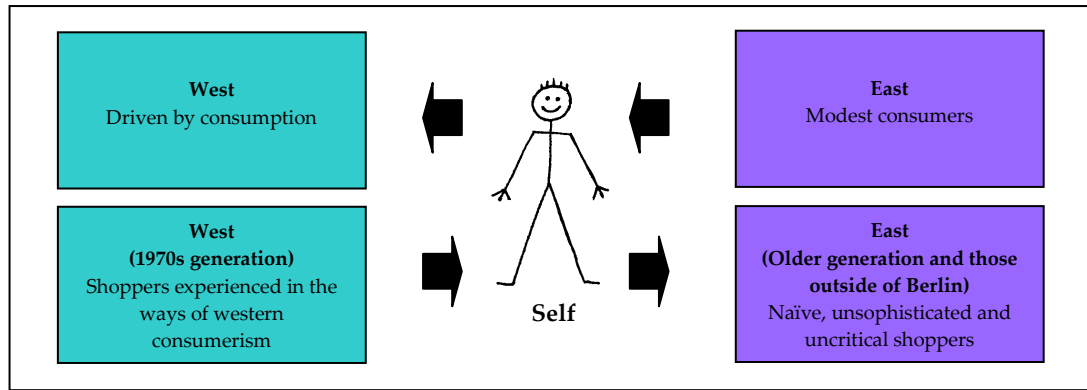
[which holds predominantly negative connotations] to reflect those values perceived amongst themselves as both positive and characteristic of easterners' (2000, p. 59). The participants, then, appear to be challenging the idea of western superiority by asserting positive eastern attributes, so they are expressing a sense of *Ossi*-pride.

### **Negotiating perceptions of eastern and western consumers**

The participants' narratives revealed that perceptions of consumption feed significantly into the ways that they negotiate their identities. It would be misleading to suggest that the methodological framework has not shaped this finding in some ways. Consumption, or more specifically gift-giving, was selected as an appropriate theme to encourage discussion throughout the interviews. This is because, in terms of east Germanness, it is a relatively neutral but also highly relevant subject. As a social practice which existed in the GDR and continues to play an important role in unified Germany, it proved useful in encouraging the participants to locate their perceptions between the past and present. Since the theme does not link directly to east Germanness, however, it also ensured that the participants' responses were not pre-empted by my use of more loaded conceptions of the east.<sup>62</sup> The influence of the methodological framework, however, should not detract from the usefulness of the findings relating to consumption. The theme was selected for the interviews because it has been frequently presented as a key social practice for understanding eastern identity process (see, for example, Berdahl, 1999a, 1999b, 2000, 2001; Bach, 2002; Blum, 2000; Kelly-Holmes, 2000 and Ten Dyke, 2000). As anticipated, exploring a social practice which has remained, but changed dramatically through unification shed light onto how the participants make sense of and, in their eyes, use their GDR experiences in unified Germany. In their narratives, the participants negotiated four sets of consumer attitudes in their identity processes, as demonstrated by this diagram:

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<sup>62</sup> Pp. 81-87 explain the rationale for using consumption in the methodological framework in more detail.



The figure in the centre of the diagram signifies the self, or the participants. The four boxes surrounding the figure outline the sets of consumer attitudes that the participants identified as relevant to their identity processes. They associated those in the green boxes with the west, and those in the purple boxes with the east. It is important to point out that the east-west distinction in the diagram is intended to reflect the participants' perceptions – as with the other characteristics explained in this chapter, the participants framed their perceptions with the idea that the east and west act as polar opposites. The arrows surrounding the central figure indicate whether or not the participants identified with or distanced themselves from each set of characteristics. The arrows pointing towards the self signify the characteristics which they perceive to be a part of their identities, and the arrows pointing away from the self illustrate those from which they disassociate themselves. It should be noted that the perceived eastern and western characteristics are, according to the participants, linked. They distance themselves from the perception that the west is driven by consumption by labelling themselves as easterners, and as such modest consumers. Likewise, they identify with 1970s generation westerners, whom they perceive to be experienced consumers, in order to counteract the perception that easterners are naïve and unsophisticated shoppers. Significantly, the participants' identifications with the west are more important than the generational similarities. They associate themselves with western characteristic to distance themselves from negative eastern stereotypes, and use generational similarities as a means to do this.

The participants' perceptions of distinctive consumer attitudes link to some of the findings analysed in the chapter on negotiating east Germanness through rejection. When discussing economic circumstances, the participants distanced themselves from what they perceived to be economically privileged westerners. This is not to say that they presented themselves as underprivileged easterners. They were keen to point out that they enjoy economic stability and happily engage in consumption, but also that they are not as driven by consumption as they consider westerners to be.<sup>63</sup> This tendency is indicated in the top left-hand box of the diagram. They also disassociated themselves from a subgroup of eastern consumers, labelling them as naïve, unsophisticated and uncritical shoppers.<sup>64</sup> This is shown in the bottom right-hand box of the diagram.

This section focuses on the consumer perceptions with which the participants identify, so the idea that easterners are modest consumers and that 1970s generation westerners are experienced in the ways of western consumerism. The remainder of this section is divided into two parts; the first analyses perceptions of the east and the second perceptions of the west. Exploring how the participants incorporate the perception that easterners are modest consumers into their identity processes demonstrates that this idea is entwined with their other conceptions about a collective east Germanness. For the participants, their modest consumption works together with their sense of community and tendency to prioritise personal relationships over career to make them more socially engaged individuals. Looking at the processes by which they identify with perceived western characteristics once again highlights the importance of generation in their identity processes. The participants claim that, when it comes to taking an experienced and sophisticated approach to shopping, they have more in common with westerners of their own generation than older easterners. The uses of generation here reflect that in chapter five, where the participants subcategorised older generation easterners and ascribed negative perceptions of

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<sup>63</sup> The arguments about economic stability are outlined in detail on pp. 174-177.

<sup>64</sup> Analysis of the participants' narratives about this group of easterners can be found on pp. 179-185.

the east onto them.<sup>65</sup> It also shows that, when it comes to self-perceptions, generation acts as a key tool in constructing a form of east Germanness that the participants perceive to be more fitting to their own understandings.

#### Identifications with the east: A more modest approach to shopping

The participants' perceptions about distinctive eastern consumer attitudes are comparable to their ideas about a collective east Germanness, in that they are considered to be common to *all* easterners. They explained that, as easterners, they shared in modest consumer values, and therefore have a higher appreciation for what they have and for the simpler aspects of life, such as health and family.

Returning to an extract from Anna's interview is a useful starting point here. She neatly summarises the process by which easterners have become more modest consumers:

Und ich glaube, dass Leute, die aus dem Osten kommen und die diese Zeit kennen, wo es immer etwas gab, was sie nicht haben konnten, dass die sich irgendwann versorgt haben mit allem, was sie haben wollten und dann sind sie versorgt, irgendwann sind sie dann gesättigt.

(I think that people who come from the east and know this time, where there was always something that they couldn't have, that at some point they've got everything that they want, and then they're taken care of, at some point then they're satisfied.)

According to Anna, easterners make more modest consumers, and ultimately have a higher appreciation for what they have, because they experienced consumer shortages in the GDR. This means that, for Anna, this mentality stems from socialist experiences, and not from post-unification experiences. In fact, Anna implicitly suggests that this mentality has become ingrained for east Germans, so that they are not driven by consumption even when the consumer opportunities of a capitalist society are open to them.

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<sup>65</sup> The parallels between the participants' perceptions of older easterners and negative popular perceptions of the east are explained on pp. 179-185 (in relation to consumption) and pp. 185-195 (in relation to *Ostalgie*).

It is also notable that Anna homogenously attributes these characteristics to the east, and in doing so implicitly excludes the west from her characterisation. By treating the east as a homogenous group, she also includes herself in this group of modest consumers. This tendency is echoed in the other participants' narratives about positive eastern consumer attitudes. The following account is taken from a part of the interview where Eva is comparing her experiences of consumption as a child in the GDR to those of westerners her age:

Ja, ja, als Erwachsene, denke ich, das hat mir viel gegeben für heute. [...] Uh...ich glaube schon, dass das ein Unterschied ist, ja. Auf jeden Fall hat man, glaube ich, ein anderes Verhältnis zum Geld und zu den Möglichkeiten, die man heute hat.

(Yeah, yeah, as an adult I think that it's given me a lot for today. [...] Um, I do think that that's a difference, yeah. In any case you have, I think, a different attitude to money and to the opportunities that there are today.)

As was the case with Anna, Eva makes no direct reference to her perceptions of western consumer attitudes. She claims that there are differences, but does not elaborate on this, focusing instead on how she personally has benefited from her eastern experiences. Importantly, she is also more explicit in her assertion that these attributes constitute positive personality traits, pointing out that her experiences have 'given her a lot for today'. The benefits of having experienced consumer shortages for life in unified Germany come through even more clearly in the following account from Maike's interview:

[...] dass ich viel gelernt habe, mit wenig zufrieden zu sein und dass das Wichtigste die Familie ist. Also ich brauche kein...irgendwas Materielles, Playstation oder so was. [...] Ich habe meine Familie und das so halt, ja die einfachsten Dinge eigentlich, dass man sich da so freut.

([...] that I've learnt a lot about being happy with less and that family is the most important thing. I mean, I don't need any...nothing material, Playstations or whatever. [...] I have my family and things, yeah, the simplest things really that make you happy.)

When I asked Maike whether she thought her childhood experiences of the GDR had impacted on her life today, she immediately referred to consumption, explaining that her modest consumer desires mean she has more appreciation for the simpler things in life, such as her family. The participants' perceptions that easterners are more modest consumers appear, therefore, to be entwined with their overall conceptions about a collective east Germanness. The narratives analysed above demonstrated that the values relating to community engagement and personal relationships interweave and are mutually constitutive. Perceptions about consumer modesty constitute another strand in this weave. The participants perceive themselves, and other easterners, to be less driven by consumption because of the importance they place on people around them, or the 'simpler things in life'. By the same token, their consumer attitudes play a formative role in their tendency to have a strong sense of community and place relatively more importance on personal relationships.

#### Identifications with the west: A more sophisticated approach to shopping

In addition to shedding light on identifications with fellow easterners, the findings of the interviews revealed that the participants define themselves by what they perceive to be typically west German traits. Nine of the twenty participants identified with western consumer attitudes, which substantiates the argument that the participants' understandings do not reflect the clear-cut categorisations which dominate overarching discourse. Their east Germanness cannot be explained as an identity which is entirely distinctive from the west; instead they express both sameness and difference in relation to westerners.

There was a key difference between their understandings of eastern positive characteristics and western positive characteristics. Whereas the participants homogenously applied the positive eastern traits to the new *Länder*, they used generation to differentiate the west in their narratives, and only identified with westerners from their own generation. Notably, they also used generation to create a subgroup of easterners in order to distance themselves from the negative



mainstream ideas that easterners are naïve, unsophisticated and uncritical shoppers, as shown in chapter five.<sup>66</sup> Importantly, it was the same participants who differentiated the east and west according to generation - the nine participants who identified with western consumer attitudes also used generation to distance themselves from eastern consumer characteristics.

Through identifying with 1970s generation westerners, the participants associated themselves with 'western' consumer characteristics. They thereby further cemented their distance from the negative eastern consumer attitudes which they ascribe to older easterners. It is important to clarify the use of the 1970s generation label here; the participants highlight generational similarities rather than explicitly identifying with the west as a whole so that they can hold on to a sense of east Germanness. The specific attitudes which these participants identified with varied from adopting the behaviours of a throwaway society to gaining enjoyment from presenting their personalities through their consumer choices. By defining themselves by these characteristics, all of the participants made the same point in their narratives – that they are experienced shoppers who are at ease with the norms of western consumption. Alexander sums up this sentiment in the following account:

Also nach zwanzig Jahren ist es die nächste Generation, also die eigentlich aufgewachsen sind im Kapitalismus. Diese Konsumenten, die jetzt die Hauptkonsumenten sind, die sind ja eigentlich...ja...man kann nicht sagen west, man kann sagen deutsch, gesamtdeutsch.

(I mean after twenty years it's now the next generation, I mean, they've really grown up under capitalism. These consumers, who are now the main consumers, they're really...yeah...you can't say west, you can say German, pan-German.)

By claiming that there is no difference between eastern and western consumers of the 1970s generation, Alexander is using generation to create subgroups, consisting of both easterners and westerners in his age group. He is therefore emphasising that, when it comes to certain consumer values, 'pan- German'

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<sup>66</sup> See pp. 178-185.

generational similarities are stronger than commonalities within the eastern population. He therefore not only implies sameness with the west, but cements the distance between older easterners and himself.

The language that Alexander uses to describe this group of consumers is also very revealing. After labelling them as the 'main consumers' he pauses, realising that it is not appropriate to describe this group as western, but that they should be known as German. The fact that his first thought was to describe them as western is indicative of the dominance of western norms in Germany. It was common for participants to first describe norms in unified Germany as western, and then correct themselves and refer to them as German.

Sonja also referred to generation when discussing eastern and western consumers, but she was more specific in her characterisation than Alexander, referring directly to the throwaway society which is typical of the west:

Ich würde mal denken, dass man sich im Westen schneller getrennt hat von Dingen. Also man spricht auch von der sogenannten Wegwerfgesellschaft, weil die Dinge nicht so teuer sind, und weil sie leichter wieder zu beschaffen sind. [...] Im Osten war das so, man musste sich zu helfen wissen, es gab das nicht neu zu beschaffen ohne weiteres, also hat man das eher repariert oder irgendwie anders gelöst. Und es ist heute immer noch so, dass meine Eltern Dinge eher aufheben und länger behalten, als alles wieder neu zu kaufen.

(I would have thought that people in the west got rid of things more quickly. I mean, people talk about the so-called throwaway society because things are not as expensive and because they're easier to get hold of. [...] In the east it was like, you had to know how to help yourself, there was nothing else to get hold of so you had to repair things or sort it out some other way. And maybe it's still like that today, that my parents hold on to things and keep them for longer rather than always buying new ones.)

Perhaps most striking about this extract is that when talking about the east, Sonja does not refer to herself, but to her parents. Before locating herself in relation to these behaviours, she implies that she associates the eastern mindset with older generations. In response to the above account I asked Sonja whether she, like her

parents, tended to keep hold of consumables for longer than people in the west. She replied:

Nee. Also [...], da denke ich mir, ich mache mir meinen Alltag möglichst leicht, und wenn ich es mir leisten kann, dann möchte ich das alles bequem haben und dann kaufe ich mir auch neu, ja.

(No. I mean [...], I think I make my everyday life as easy as possible, and if I can afford it, then I like everything to be convenient and so I would also buy a new one, yeah.)

In her response, then, she explicitly positions herself alongside westerners by claiming that she has adopted the behaviours of a throwaway society, explaining that she is keen to make her life 'convenient' and 'as easy as possible'. Her preferences here are vastly different from those that she implies older easterners have – rather than taking the easy option and replacing the object in question, they would rather spend time and effort to repair the broken object. Sonja therefore distances herself from this subgroup of easterners in three ways. First, she implies that it is predominantly older easterners who abstain from the throwaway society, thereby excluding herself from the bracket. Second, she goes on to explicitly claim that she engages with the throwaway society. Third, Sonja explains her behaviour in line with her description of western consumers. Significantly, through these discursive strategies she is also identifying with the west, presenting herself as a consumer who is at ease with, and even makes the most of the western consumer culture.

As well as identifying with behaviours relating to the throwaway society, the participants in this group expressed that they had come to enjoy engaging in consumption in order to present their personalities to others. The following extract, taken from Lina's interview, is typical of these participants' perceptions:

Man zeigt, dass man auch einen bestimmten Geschmack hat und so. Und ich habe aber auch Gefallen dran, ich habe auch gemerkt, das macht auch Spaß. Es macht auch Spaß irgendwie mit bestimmten Sachen meine Persönlichkeit dann irgendwie rauszustellen. Es ist immer noch nicht so, dass ich zum Beispiel was von Gucci oder Bottega Veneta oder so was

haben muss, sondern es ist aber natürlich so, dass ich sage, ich will von einem coolen Berliner Designer was haben.

(You show that you have a certain taste and things. And I actually also get pleasure from it, I've also noticed that, it's fun. It's also fun to somehow show my personality through certain things. It's still not so that I, for example, have to have something from Gucci or Bottega Veneta or something, but it's more that I say, I'd like something from a cool Berlin designer.)

Importantly, this account was preceded by an anecdote about her parents and her west German in-laws, where she told me how differently they approach consumption. She claimed that her eastern parents often feel overwhelmed by the consumer choices they are faced with and are hesitant in making consumer decisions. She was therefore making a comparison between older generations of easterners and westerners in terms of consumption. She then went on to position herself in relation to her characterisations, claiming that immediately after unification she too was disillusioned by the west, finding it overpowering and materialistic. During the two decades which have passed since then, however, she has evidently come to enjoy shopping to show her personality. She makes reference to this three times in the space of two sentences, first saying that she 'gets pleasure from it', then twice stating that 'it's fun'. Lina's repetition here should not simply be interpreted as a sign that she enjoys engaging in western consumption. She is also expressing surprise about the fact that she has found enjoyment in such practices. This is illustrated by her use of 'actually' in her anecdote, which suggests that she did not expect to enjoy western consumption. Most important here is the process that Lina is alluding to – she is implying that she has changed when it comes to consumption, that she has become westernised. This comes through even more clearly in the following extract, which is taken from the same part of the interview:

Die westlichen Einstellungen haben sich gar nicht verändert, meine Meinungen...ich habe das begriffen, was ich vorher nicht wusste, was ich zwar wusste, aber was mich nicht interessiert hat.

(The western attitudes haven't changed at all, my opinions...I have got a grasp of it, things I didn't know before, things I knew, but that didn't interest me.)

This perception is comparable to that in Alexander's account above, where he refers to unified Germany as the west. Both of these accounts reflect the nature of the unification process, which was not based on compromise between the east and west, but involved implementing western norms in the new *Länder*. Importantly, however, Lina is not critical of this in her account; in fact she endorses it by expressing such enjoyment about western consumption. What is more, looking at this comment in light of her story about her east German parents, it is clear that Lina identifies more with the west than with older easterners when it comes to feeling at ease in a consumer society.

### **The construction of the 1970s generation as a unique group**

Exploring the positive identifications which make up the participants' identity processes revealed that they also perceived their own generation to hold a unique set of characteristics. When constructing this group, they separated themselves from westerners by emphasising their GDR experiences, and distinguished themselves from other generations of easterners by claiming that they were at the ideal age when unification took place. Consequently, they believe that they are in the best position to make the most of what they learned through their socialist upbringing in the context of unified Germany. Of the twenty participants, nineteen expressed that that they personally had benefited from unification, but that many members of older generations had been disadvantaged by it. Fifteen of this group also claimed that, having experienced two systems, they possess attributes relating to objectivity and open-mindedness which give them an advantage over westerners in unified Germany. There are two important points to emerge from these findings. First, that the participants present 1970s generation easterners as a distinctive group with unique and beneficial attributes in contemporary Germany. Second, the participants make it clear that the objectivity and open-mindedness that they have gained from their experiences

must be put to good use in unified Germany in order to be considered beneficial. In this sense, they conceptualise their east Germanness positively in the context of unified Germany.

### The optimum age for unification

When the participants discussed their experiences of unification, they overwhelmingly differentiated the 1970s generation and older easterners. The following extract, taken from Eva's interview, is a typical example of the participants' accounts:

Viele haben durch die Wende auch verloren, die älteren Leute. Meine Generation hat gewonnen, glaube ich.

(Many lost because of unification, the older people. My generation won, I think.)

Particularly striking about Eva's distinction is that she presents the two generations as having antipodal experiences of unification. She uses the verb 'win' to describe the 1970s generation, and then the opposite verb 'lose' to depict older generations. Importantly, this means first that she perceives her own age-group to have benefited from unification. According to Eva, however, older easterners have not reaped these benefits, but have actually been disadvantaged by the process. This view, which was typical among the participants, is explained further by Stefan:

In meiner Generation nicht, eher in der Generation meiner Eltern, weil ich daheim auch viele kenne, die auch seit der Wende arbeitslos sind oder die dann eben kämpfen müssen, so dass sie dann irgendwelche Gelder kriegen und eigentlich, ich sage mal, den Kapitalismus, die Marktwirtschaft von ihrer nicht schönen Seite erleben seit der Wende.

(Not in my generation, more in my parents' generation because there I know a lot of people who have been unemployed since unification or had to fight so that they got some income and actually, I would say they have experienced the bad side of capitalism, or the market economy since unification.)

Stefan talks empathically about older generations who have suffered unemployment because of the poor economic situation in the east. He emphasises the difficulties that older easterners have been confronted with by claiming they had to 'fight' for a decent income. By using the verb 'fight', he suggests that this group have strived to reach economic stability in unified Germany, but have not succeeded because of significant hardship. He does not hold older generations of easterners responsible for their apparent lack of success since unification, but the capitalist system – this becomes clear at the end of the extract when he states that this group has 'experienced the bad side of capitalism'.

It is striking, however, that the agency shifts when he is discussing his own generation:

In meiner Generation, würde ich sagen, die haben alle relativ schnell den Sprung geschafft. Also die, die jetzt in den 70ern geboren sind, wir waren zur Wende 19 und junge Leute. [...] Das war die Chance des Lebens in jungen Jahren, wo man noch kräftig ist und so. Aber die davor eben, die hatten das schwerer.

(In my generation I would say everyone managed the jump relatively quickly. I mean, those who were born in the 1970s, we were 19 at the time of unification and young people. That was a once in a lifetime opportunity for younger people, when you're still strong and things. But those before, they had had it harder.)

When discussing the 1970s generation, Stefan suggests that they played a significant role in succeeding in unified Germany. Positioning them as a subject in the sentence, '*everyone* managed the jump relatively quickly', he infers that the 1970s generation *actively* adapted to the new social system. This claim implies that easterners had to make changes to their lives in order to reap the benefits of unified Germany. What is more, he emphasises that this process of adaptation was challenging – by explaining that the reason for this success was that the younger generation were stronger, he is claiming that you needed to have strength to get to grips with the new system. As shown above, however, he does

not hold older generations responsible for apparently not having this strength, but the social system for failing to support them.

These findings relate to claims in existing literature that easterners have failed to come to terms with unification. There are two schools of thought within this argument. The first proposes that this is because easterners themselves have refused to accept the new system. The second places emphasis on the nature of the unification process, claiming that it was its poor management which has led to difficulties in the east and ultimately prevented easterners from coming to terms with the new system.<sup>67</sup> Neither of these claims match the participants' perceptions of themselves – they make clear that they have not only got to grips with the new system, but have also enjoyed success within it. Importantly, these successes are not a result of unification itself, but the participants' efforts to flourish within unified Germany. When discussing older generations of easterners, however, the participants' perceptions do better correspond to claims made in existing literature, in that they agree that this age-group has experienced more problems in coming to terms with unification. They do not explicitly blame this group for having less success in unified Germany, but the capitalist system which they believe has disadvantaged them. When it comes to older easterners then, the participants' understandings correspond better to the argument that it is the mismanagement of unification which has caused this group to struggle in unified Germany. Nonetheless, the shifts in agency in the participants' narratives indicate some tensions; they claim that they have played a key role in their apparent success in the new system, but absolve older easterners of responsibility for the difficulties that they are perceived to have faced in unified Germany. The participants appear to believe that they were in a better position to *actively* overcome these difficulties than those from older generations.

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<sup>67</sup> These arguments are made by scholars such as Gensicke (1995, 1998) and Goll and Leurer (2004), as explained in the section entitled, 'Perspective one: East German identities are problematic for German unity', on pp. 39-43.



This shift in agency is echoed in Sonja's account below, which also reveals how the mainstream idea that easterners have caused the problems they have faced since unification influence eastern identity processes:

In meiner Generation..hmm..merke ich...die sind eigentlich alle relativ gut angekommen in ihrem Leben und ich kenne keine Arbeitslosen in dem Sinne aus Ostdeutschland. [...] Also das ist eben der große Vorteil von denen, glaube ich, die in den 70er Jahren geboren wurden, dass die rechtzeitig genug im Westen angekommen sind. Die Schule war zu Ende, Abitur gemacht und mit dem Studium ist man praktisch im...hat man im Westen gelebt. Und dann hatte man das ganze Studium lang Zeit, sich zu orientieren und zurechtzufinden in der Gesellschaft. [...] Das ist ein großer Vorteil gewesen. Im Vergleich zu unseren Eltern, die haben die Kurve nicht gekriegt und, aber das kann man ihnen auch nicht vorwerfen, weil sie haben so eine lange Zeit in der DDR gelebt und hatten ja schon ihre Berufe und dann noch mal sich umzuorientieren war ja wesentlich schwieriger als bei uns, die ja praktisch neu angefangen haben. Es war so ein super Schnitt bei mir. [...] Ich glaube, unserer Generation geht's vielleicht noch am besten.

(In my generation...hmmm...I've noticed...they've actually all done relatively well in their lives and I don't know anyone who's unemployed in that sense. [...] I mean, I think that's really the big advantage for those who were born in the 1970s, that they came to the west in time. School was over, *Abitur* [A-Level equivalent] done and with the degree you're practically...you lived in the west. And then you had the whole of the time spent doing your degree to orientate yourself and find your way in the society. [...] That was a big advantage. In comparison to our parents, they didn't manage the change and, but they can't be blamed for that because they lived in the GDR for so long and already had their careers and to then re-orientate themselves was considerably harder than it was for us, they practically started all over again. It was a brilliant cut-off point for me. [...] I think our generation perhaps got the most out of it.)

Sonja agrees that easterners from older generations have endured more difficulties in unified Germany, and is also keen to point out that they are not responsible for these issues. In her claim 'they can't be blamed [...] [it] was considerably harder for them than it was for us, they practically started all over again', she is more explicit than Stefan in absolving them from responsibility. It is notable that she makes this comment immediately after stating that older generations 'didn't manage the change' – it seems as though she expected this

claim to be interpreted as an assertion that older easterners are to blame for not adjusting to the new system. This suggests that perceptions that easterners have not come to terms with unification because of their own actions resonate in unified Germany. It seems that, when discussing post-unification difficulties, the participants assert that easterners are held responsible and economic or social factors overlooked. They are keen to ensure that their claims are not misconstrued by these perceptions – this finding once again indicates the problematic influence that mainstream ideas about the apparent refusal of easterners to accept western norms may have over perceptions of the east.

Another parallel between Sonja's account and other participants' narratives about unification is that she enthusiastically points out how she has benefited from living in unified Germany. Eva explained that her generation had 'won' as a result of unification, and Stefan emphatically described it as 'a once in a lifetime opportunity'. Sonja echoes these statements, using the adjectives, 'great' and 'brilliant'. It is, however, important to note that Sonja qualifies these advantages by explaining that the 1970s generation were at the optimum age for the social changes to take place, as they had almost completed their education and could move into the working world under the new system. Therefore, in comparison to their parents, the participants had little or nothing to lose in terms of career and stood mainly to benefit from the new opportunities that unified Germany had to offer.

#### The advantages of having experienced two social systems

When presenting the 1970s generation as a unique group, fifteen of the participants identified distinctive characteristics that they perceive to have been learned through experiencing two social systems. Marie, for example, points out that she is able to look upon different social and political structures more objectively:

Objektiver vielleicht, ja. Man kennt halt zwei Seiten, man kennt Sozialismus und Kapitalismus und ist zu beiden kritisch. Also Sozialismus genauso, ja.

(More objective perhaps, yeah. You know two sides, you know socialism and capitalism and are critical towards both. I mean socialism too, yeah.)

By claiming that her objectivity comes from her experiences of *two* systems, Marie suggests that it is not only her GDR upbringing which shapes her perceptions, but also her experiences in post-unification Germany. It is the combination of these experiences which enable Marie to make comparisons and thus, in her view, a more balanced assessment of the systems in question.

Importantly, Marie emphasises that she takes a critical perspective of both the GDR *and* unified Germany. She was not alone in making this claim – all of the participants who highlighted the significance of having experienced two systems made it clear that they looked upon both systems critically. This challenges the idea that, by identifying with the east, easterners risk having a skewed view of unified Germany, an argument which is made quite often in existing literature. According to this way of thinking, attachments to the east may taint perceptions of contemporary Germany and thus jeopardise identifications with the unified state.<sup>68</sup> The participants, on the other hand, saw their experiences of two systems as a benefit rather than a hindrance in the context of unified Germany. They made it clear that, rather than distorting their perceptions of unified Germany, they helped them to view it more clearly. By critically comparing the GDR and contemporary Germany, they can identify the advantages and disadvantages of each system.

Marie goes on to more explicitly explain that, as this objectivity results from having experienced two systems, it is a feature which is not shared by westerners:

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<sup>68</sup> This argument is made most commonly by scholars such as Gensicke (1995, 1998) and Goll and Leurer (2004) in relation to *Ostalgie*. As shown on pp. 39-42, they claim that this apparently 'rose-tinted' perception of the GDR prevents easterners from fully identifying with unified Germany.

Die Erfahrung in der DDR, ermöglicht es mir, also zwei Systeme zu kennen, ermöglicht es mir vielleicht einen objektiveren Blick zu haben als jemand, der seine ganze Kindheit im Westen verbracht hat, ja.

(And the experience in the GDR enables me to, knowing two systems, enables me perhaps to have a more objective view than someone who spent their whole childhood in the west, yeah.)

This finding is significant because it adds another example to the list of beneficial attributes which the participants consider they have gained from their GDR experiences. They therefore further challenge the perception that east Germanness is seen as inferior to west Germanness<sup>69</sup> – in the participants' eyes, they possess features which not only put them on an equal footing with their western counterparts, but actually stand them in better stead in contemporary Germany.

Stefan makes the same point in the following account. He also explains, however, that he does not consider this attribute to be a homogenous part of east Germanness:

Kritisch. Kritisch, ich sage immer, die in der DDR, oder die eben aus der ehemaligen DDR, die haben zwei Systeme kennengelernt und die können freier damit umgehen...können – machen sie nicht unbedingt, aber sie könnten freier damit umgehen, auch die westliche Ideologie zu vergleichen und zu hinterfragen. Das sehe ich in meiner Generation, also eher auf der ostdeutschen Seite als auf der westdeutschen Seite.

(Critical. I always say critical, those from the GDR, or those from the former GDR, they've got to know two systems and they can deal with it more openly...could – they don't necessarily do it, but they can deal with it more openly, and also compare and challenge western ideology. I see that in my generation, I mean more on the east German side than on the west German side.)

Stefan differentiates the east in two ways in his narrative. First, he specifies his own generation when making a distinction between the east and west. Second, he claims that, although everyone who came from the GDR has the ability to use

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<sup>69</sup> These assertions correspond to the claims made by scholars working on the *zweite-Klasse Mentalität* and the *Trotzidentität*. According to these concepts, outlined on pp. 34-36, east Germanness is based on sentiments of inferiority in the face of the west.

their experiences to be more critical, they do not all act upon it. Returning to another extract from Stefan's interview where he is discussing easterners who, in his eyes, have not come to terms with unification, provides further clarification about how he differentiates the east in terms of critical thinking:

Also wir haben jetzt eine neue Situation, mit der er nicht klarkommt. Und wenn wir mit dieser neuen Situation unzufrieden sind, dann müssen wir es angucken, womit sind wir unzufrieden, und dann müssen wir was tun, um diese Situation besser zu machen.

(I mean, now we have a new situation, that he isn't getting to grips with. And if we're unhappy with this new situation, then we have to look at it, and what we are unhappy with, and then we have to do something to make the situation better.)

For Stefan, therefore, *all* easterners have the potential to draw on their experiences of two systems to improve the current situation, but only *some* actually make use of their experiences in unified Germany. If easterners make the most out of this attribute, he considers it to be very beneficial in unified Germany. However, he is critical of those who complain about shortcomings in the capitalist system, but do not take any action to improve their situation.

Most significant here is perhaps that Stefan contextualises the benefits of having experienced two systems within unified Germany. His attachment to this east German attribute cannot be interpreted as a form of detachment from unified Germany, as is suggested in the scholarly argument outlined above. In fact, he problematises easterners who, in his view, focus too heavily on the past and therefore fail to use their experiences of two systems to improve their situation in the unified state. For Stefan, as with the other participants in this group, experiences of the GDR do not prevent identifications with Germany, but can actually make you a more proactive and engaged member of society.

The participants perceive their experiences of two systems to have not only made them more critically reflective, but also more open-minded. These two characteristics are intrinsically linked in their narratives; in order to use your experiences to take a more objective view of the different systems, you need to be

open to learning about each system. It was when discussing the issue of open-mindedness that the participants identified their generation as a unique group. These sentiments come through in the following extract, where Julia is telling me about when her east German family and neighbours met her west German boyfriend:

Als ich mich dann gelöst hatte und auch in den Westen gezogen bin, war es wie eine Befreiung, weil ich damit nicht mehr anfangen konnte. Es war wirklich so, dass das noch bis vor zehn, elf Jahren so war, dass irgendwie die Nachbarn mit meinen Eltern waren auf einer Party und mein Freund kommt und da wird er erst fertig gemacht, weil er ein Wessi ist. Also das ist schon heftig gewesen, das war kleinbürgerliches Denken, dieses nicht sich öffnen wollen, nicht gucken wollen, was dahintersteckt. Erstmal kommt was Neues, was Fremdes und zumachen, einfach zumachen und nicht weiterdenken, das hat mich erstickt.

(It was like being liberated when I left and moved to the west because I couldn't deal with it anymore. It really was like, this was about ten or eleven years ago, our neighbours were at a party or something with my parents and my boyfriend came along and he was really torn apart because he's a westerner. I mean, it was really heavy-going, it was a petty bourgeois way of thinking, this refusal to be open-minded, to look more closely at what's behind appearances. The first time something new comes along, something unfamiliar, and you shut off to it, simply shut off to it and not think any further, that suffocated me.)

Julia makes it clear that she was extremely frustrated by her parents' closed-mindedness towards westerners following unification. Her use of an adjective as strong as 'suffocated' to express how she was affected by such perceptions together with her claim that she felt 'liberated' when she moved away from the east are very telling. She emphatically emphasises that she found this apparent lack of openness to be exasperating and quite distressing. When telling me what happened when her parents met her west German boyfriend, she uses terms to highlight that the encounter was very acrimonious, claiming that he was 'torn apart' and that the experience was 'really heavy-going'. The way that Julia constructs her narrative indicates that she is very critical of this apparent closed-mindedness, and certainly does not identify with this group of easterners.

Towards the end of her account she implicitly explains where she positions herself in relation to this group. She indignantly criticises her parents and neighbours for refusing to 'be open-minded' or 'look more closely at what's behind appearances'. Deconstructing this narrative shows that, conversely, Julia perceives herself to be open to new experiences and to look beyond social labels to understand people's individual personalities.

It is important to note how Julia constructs this group of easterners in her narrative. When telling the story about the party, she points out that it was her parents who could not see beyond the fact that her boyfriend came from the west, and judged him on this basis. Therefore, like Stefan in the extract above, Julia suggests that it is older generations of easterners who are closed-minded when it comes to new post-unification experiences. The tendency to ascribe this mentality to older easterners is similar to a finding which was analysed in chapter five. When discussing *Ostalgie*, the participants frequently described it as a mindset which was most common among easterners born before the 1970s. Their perceptions of *Ostalgie* had many parallels with the image of closed-mindedness that they painted – they are both based on the idea that these easterners are too stuck in their 'eastern' ways and need to be more open to unified Germany.<sup>70</sup>

The participants perceive, therefore, the benefits of having experienced two systems to be unique to their generation of easterners. Westerners are excluded from this bracket because they have not lived within a different social system, and thus, in the participants' eyes, do not have the insights required to make objective comparisons. Older easterners are not members of this group either because, for the participants, they are less likely to adopt an open-minded view of unified Germany, and therefore cannot make use of their dual experiences to see both the east and west in a critical light. When it comes to benefiting from experiencing two systems, therefore, the participants reiterate that they were at the optimum age for unification. They were old enough to bring what they learned in the GDR with them to unified Germany, but young enough to be open

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<sup>70</sup> This argument is explained in more detail on pp. 188-192.

to the new experiences that came with unification. In this sense, they consider themselves to be in a better position than both westerners and older generations of easterners in the context of unified Germany. They are not held back by their GDR experiences and use their insights into two different social systems to view more objectively, and importantly, improve their lives in the unified state. Therefore, they use the label '1970s generation easterner' to construct a group of easterners who as well as avoiding negative eastern stereotypes, define themselves as being in a better position than westerners in unified Germany.

### **Negotiating east Germanness in unified Germany**

Bringing together the participants' identifications with different perceptions of the east and west sheds light on how they construct their east Germanness in unified Germany. In summary, they presented themselves as being modest and thoughtful consumers who take pleasure from the social practice. They claimed that they were as experienced and sophisticated as their western counterparts, but are not as driven by the desire to consume. Instead, they prioritise a sense of community and their personal relationships, and are keen to express that they appreciate the simpler aspects of life. They also proposed that, having experienced two systems, they were more open-minded and critical thinkers, and thus more proactive and engaged citizens of contemporary Germany.

Taking this self-characterisation in its entirety, it appears to hold strong correlations with the idea of post-materialism. This concept, coined by Ronald Inglehart in the 1970s (McLarney and Chung, 1999, p. 288) refers to a decrease in the significance of economic interests, and a subsequent increase in the importance of social and political values (Inglehart, 1971, pp. 991-992). Inglehart and Scott C. Flanagan explain that

in the long run there seems to be a tendency for the pursuit of economic self-interest itself to reach a point of diminishing returns in advanced industrial societies, and gradually give way to postmaterialist motivation, including greater emphasis on social solidarity (1987, p. 1292).



Before analysing the participants' self-perceptions within the post-materialist framework, it is useful to point out some other fundamental aspects of the concept. First, post-materialist values come into play once an individual is satisfied in terms of economic security (Inglehart, 1971, p. 991). Only then will the individual's interests shift to post-materialist values, which emphasise the importance of social solidarity. This means that post-materialism can only exist in advanced and affluent societies in which individuals perceive themselves to have achieved economic security. Second, it should be noted that it can refer to a shift in focus from materialism to post-materialism, so cannot be seen as the complete rejection of materialist values for post-materialist ones. As McLarney and Chung explain, 'a post-materialist places higher priorities on post-materialistic values, not necessarily negative values on materialistic goals' (1999, p. 289). Third, it is useful to shed more light onto the exact values which make up post-materialism. Inglehart and Flanagan describe them as:

An emphasis on personal and political freedom, participation (more say in government, in one's community, and on the job), equality, tolerance of minorities and those holding different opinions, openness to new ideas and new lifestyles, environmental protection and concern for quality of life issues, self-indulgence and self-actualization (1983, p. 1304).

Comparing this list of values with those which the participants associate themselves with shows clear parallels between their self-perceptions and post-materialism. Broadly speaking, they identify themselves as being more politically engaged and open-minded, and as prioritising social solidarity and quality of life over economic desires. This is not to say they rejected the importance of economic security. The section on economic circumstances and the self in the previous chapter demonstrated that the participants consider themselves to be economically stable.<sup>71</sup> These perceptions were echoed in the section on eastern consumer attitudes, where they explained that easterners tended to be more easily satisfied when it came to materialism, and that they felt they had fulfilled their material needs. In line with the concept of post-materialism, then, the

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<sup>71</sup> See pp. 174-177.

participants are not denying the importance of economic security – they claim that they are satisfied in this sense, and that they are not driven primarily by economic desires.

The correlations between the participants' self-perceptions and the concept of post-materialism make for some important conclusions. First, they make significant steps towards allaying concerns that east Germanness is at odds with overarching norms in unified Germany, and thus risks jeopardising German unity.<sup>72</sup> It seems, in fact, that the participants have constructed a form of east Germanness which corresponds wholly to the norms of an advanced and affluent western society like contemporary Germany. Second, they shed light on how they have constructed their own east Germanness to be a part of their Germanness. The main tool that they lean on in this process is the label '1970s generation easterner'. First, they use this to distance themselves from the negative connotations of east Germanness by ascribing them to older generation easterners, as was demonstrated in the previous chapter.<sup>73</sup> By differentiating east Germanness generationally, they are able to identify with its positive characteristics, and, most importantly, identify as easterners. To clarify, it would be simplistic to claim that the participants identify as easterners only because they identify with positive perceptions of the east. It is as important to them to be able to label themselves as easterners – they wish to express an attachment to their past and their unique experiences of two systems. In short, by identifying the 1970s generation as a unique group, they are able to negotiate an east Germanness to fit more closely to their understandings. This generational marker also enables them to adopt characteristics that they associate with the west, but maintain their east Germanness. From the participants' narratives, it seems that they do not wish to explicitly identify with the west. This is perhaps because of the tensions within the east-west distinction, which has framed the participants'

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<sup>72</sup> A key concern among some researchers (such as Gensicke, 1995, 1998; Goll and Leurer, 2004; Reißig, 2000 and Dörmert, 1997) is that east Germanness is at odds with western norms, and thus risks preventing the full unity of Germany as explained on pp. 39-43.

<sup>73</sup> The participants used generation to distance themselves from the problematic connotations of *Ostalgie* and from the negative popular perceptions of easterners as holding distinctive consumer attitudes, as shown on pp. 179-185 (consumption) and pp. 185-195 (*Ostalgie*).

perceptions. Their narratives demonstrate, however, that they do incorporate 'western' perceptions into their identities, whether to counteract negative stereotypes of the east or because they have been living in a western system for two decades. The participants use the generational label to disguise these associations with the west, so to avoid explicitly identifying with it. They re-label these identifications as a part of a more advanced and progressive east Germanness which is held only by the 1970s generation. They are therefore able to maintain their east Germanness and conceptualise it within the norms and values with which they engage in unified Germany.

## **Conclusion**

The findings analysed in this chapter have shed light on the positive identification processes which contribute the participants' east Germanness. Drawing together the how the participants negotiate their own east Germanness within the context of unified Germany. Exploring how the participants responded to negative perceptions of east Germanness revealed that, in their own identity processes, they frequently 'normalised' or 'westernised' their attachments to the east. To do this, they distanced themselves from popular negative images of the east, often by ascribing them to older generations of easterners, or those who lived outside of Berlin. As Berliners born in the 1970s, they were automatically excluded from this group and therefore disassociated from the characteristics. They also problematised features of east Germanness which are considered to go against western ideals and modified their own conceptions by likening them to western norms.

When discussing positive eastern characteristics, on the other hand, the participants keenly identified themselves as easterners who shared in these values. They claimed that easterners in general have a stronger sense of community engagement, tend to prioritise personal relationships over career and appreciate a more modest way of life. The linguistic construction of their narratives here is very telling – in each case, they used the west as a point of

comparison and made it clear that, in their eyes, the eastern values were better than the western ones. In this sense, their accounts about a collective eastern identity corresponded closely to the concept of *Ossi-pride*.

Exploring the participants' positive identification processes also revealed that they identify with westerners as well as easterners. This does not mean that their perceptions are not framed by the idea of east-west difference. The participants made it clear that the consumer attitudes which they associated with westerners of the 1970s generation were distinctively western, and not shared by the majority of the east. They claimed, however, that as members of the 1970s generation, they had more in common with westerners when it came to being experienced consumers than they did with easterners of older generations.

The participants also used the 1970s generation label to present their age-group as unique in unified Germany. They claimed that their distinctive attributes stemmed from their experiences of two social systems, which excluded westerners from being members. They also, however, differentiated the east when formulating this group in their narratives. Stating that they were at the optimum age when unification took place, the participants explained that they were old enough to make good use of their GDR experiences, but young enough to be open to the changes that unification brought. Importantly, they perceive these experiences to put their generation of easterners in a better position than other Germans in contemporary Germany. The generational label is therefore extremely important in the participants' identity processes. It enables them to construct a form of east Germanness which, in fact, corresponds largely to the norms and values of a western post-materialist society. By redefining their east Germanness as an identity which is distinctive to the 1970s generation, the participants are fitting into western, or unified German, norms in two ways. First, they are identifying with capitalist values. Second, they are, in line with dominant discourse, deprecating the east for apparently failing to conform to western norms. By highlighting that they have been shaped by their dual experiences, they also present 1970s generation easterners as a group which is wholly distinctive in contemporary Germany. Through this process, they are able

to maintain a link to their past and highlight the beneficial attributes that they perceive they hold as easterners in unified Germany. They thus construct an east Germanness which sets them apart as being superior to older easterners and, importantly, westerners.

## Chapter Seven

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### Watching you, watching me:

### Others' perceptions in understandings of the east

A clear outcome of the interviews was that east Germanness cannot be fully understood without accounting for how easterners believe that the east is perceived in unified Germany. The participants' narratives revealed that their perceptions of the east differ when they are discussing it with other easterners or with westerners in mind, for example. External ideas therefore seem to feed into the way that the participants negotiate their east Germanness, and ultimately the way that they present it to others. The participants' narratives revealed that, overwhelmingly, they believe that the east is viewed in a negative light in the context of unified Germany. This finding forms the basis of this chapter, which explores how these perceptions affect the participants' east Germanness, and also the reasons that they are so critical of the ways that they believe they are perceived. They do not only problematise the negative and, in their view unfitting stereotypes which characterise the east. In addition, they are highly critical of the unification process for eliminating socio-political features of the GDR which they consider to have been of a higher standard than those which exist in Germany today. Their narratives about the positive features of the GDR show exactly how their perceptions are affected by their views that the east is generally perceived negatively in unified Germany. They are very careful and frequently lack confidence in their assertions. Exploring the ways that the participants believe that the east (and therefore they) are externally perceived reveals the impact that mainstream ideas which problematise the east have over their abilities to express their east Germanness in contemporary Germany.

The first section of the chapter focuses on how the participants discuss the ways in which they believe they are perceived in unified Germany. It looks primarily at their anecdotes about one-to-one encounters with westerners where they consider themselves to have been undermined by popular clichés about the east. The reasons for the participants' exasperation and frustration towards perceived

western understandings of the east become clearer in the second section. This examines the participants' perceptions of the unification process, demonstrating that they are highly critical of its one-sided nature, which they believe has not only contributed to negative perceptions of the east, but also of the eastern population.<sup>74</sup>

The third section sheds further light on exactly which features of the GDR the participants believe should have been adopted in unified Germany. They specifically identify modest approaches to consumption as well as social equality and state provisions, such as healthcare and childcare, as being benefits in the socialist state. Reading their accounts about these features provides important insights into the critical way in which the participants view unified Germany and the GDR. It also shows, however, that their perceptions are embroiled in the ways that they believe the east is generally perceived in unified Germany – their guarded claims about the positive features of the GDR demonstrate the impact of the prevailing ideas which problematise the east.

The final section focuses on how the participants believe perceptions of east Germanness have changed in the time since unification. For them, negative perceptions of the east have steadily decreased in the twenty years since unification. Given that the participants' self-perceptions are heavily shaped by the ways that they believe they are perceived by others, this finding is very important. Potentially, these shifts could have considerable consequences for the participants' self-presentations as easterners, as well as for more generic perceptions of the east.

### **Others' perceptions of the east in unified Germany**

At certain points during the interviews, the majority of the participants claimed that they face prejudice in unified Germany because of their east Germanness. Of

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<sup>74</sup> The unification process entailed the implementation of the west German social, economic and political system in the new *Länder*. The socialist GDR was, therefore, completely eradicated during the *Wende*. The history of the unification process is explained further on pp. 7-9.

the twenty participants, twelve expressed this sentiment in their narrative. This group consisted primarily of easterners who had either lived in west Germany or spent a significant amount of time in the old *Länder* as a part of their professional lives. Most commonly, the participants discussed prejudice towards easterners with reference to the term *Ossi*. They often responded defensively when I asked what *Ossi* meant, providing anecdotes about difficult encounters with westerners. They explained that, when used by westerners, the term is intended to be offensive and demeaning and reflects the apparent failure of the population of the old *Länder* to appreciate or even accept east Germanness. These perceptions are clearly illustrated in the following extract, in which Franziska is telling me about her experiences of working in Munich:

Wenn du halt in Bayern bist, und dann...ah...guck mal da, guck dir mal die Ossi Tussi an, da sieht man da schon gleich, die kommt aus dem Osten. Das ist negativ, das ist abwertend. [...] Ossi ist aber schon irgendwie für mich negativ, Wessi jetzt nicht so. Deswegen ich mag das nicht und ich finde halt, so wie du, wo bist du geboren? Großbritannien?

Ja.

Du bist in Großbritannien geboren, ich bin in Ostdeutschland geboren, der Andere ist in weiß ich nicht wo geboren, wer kann da was dafür? [...] Ich bin glücklich also, dass es so ist, aber ich kann auch nichts dafür, dass es so ist.

(When you're in Bavaria and then...um...look over there, have a look at the *Ossi Tussi*. You can see straightaway that they come from the east. That's negative, that's insulting. [...] *Ossi* is certainly negative for me in some way, *Wessi* not so much. That's why I don't like it and I find, like you, where were you born? Great Britain?

Yes.

You were born in Great Britain, I was born in east Germany, someone else was born I don't know where, what can you do about it? [...] I mean, I'm happy that it's like that, but also, there's nothing that I can do about the fact that it's like that.)

Franziska's narrative in this part of the interview became quite impassioned as she expressed frustration and resentment in response to the ways that she believes she is perceived by westerners. The first sentence of the extract was spoken in a sarcastic way, where Franziska impersonated what she perceives as



small-minded judgements on the part of westerners. Her parody of westerners suggests that she rejects the stereotypes associated with *Ossi* when it comes to her self-perceptions and presentations to others. However, as she continues, it becomes clear that the stereotypes actually profoundly affect the ways that she constructs her east Germanness. First, she attempts to normalise and deemphasise her GDR roots by comparing it to my British background, but then immediately goes back on herself by claiming that she is happy about her GDR past, thus that it actually is significant. She normalises her past, it seems, to avoid being judged on the basis of her east Germanness. Her final comment is particularly telling, as by highlighting that growing up in the GDR was not a conscious decision she made, she is suggesting that she feels that she is blamed for being east German. The normalisation in this extract should not be read as an indication that Franziska denies the importance of her GDR. The point is that she is reluctant to express this because of the judgement she feels that she will face. Instead she underplays her east Germanness and emphasises that she is not responsible for her background.

Franziska was not alone in feeling torn between expressing attachments to her east German past and deemphasising her east Germanness when it came to presenting herself to others. Sabine demonstrates the same defensive tendencies in the following extract, where she is telling me how she reacts if she is called an *Ossi*:

Wenn jemand noch so einen dummen...Klischee braucht, um die Welt für sich zu sortieren, dann macht er das halt. Aber mich verletzt das nicht oder so. Nur wenn es, wenn es auf einer tieferen Ebene sozusagen ist. [...] Ich bin in der DDR geboren. Das ist einfach so passiert, aber das hat nichts mit Überzeugungen zu tun gehabt. Es ist Zufall, es ist einfach Zufall, dass ich dort geboren wurde und es war Zufall, dass der Rest unserer Familie im Westteil Deutschlands war.

(If people need such stupid...clichés to make sense of the world, then that's fine. But it doesn't offend me or anything. Only when it, when it's meant seriously. [...] I was born in the GDR. It just happened that way, but it had nothing to do with beliefs. It's chance, it's simply chance that I was born

there and it was chance that the rest of our family was in the western part of Germany.)

Like Franziska and other participants in this group, Sabine first emphatically explains that she considers such perceptions of the east to be ignorant. She uses the adjective 'stupid' to describe the stereotypes relating to *Ossi* and suggests that she has little respect for people who engage in them. She substantiates her point by defensively claiming that she is not offended by, or that she brushes off, those who label her as an *Ossi*. However, she then goes back on her point, revealing that the stereotypes actually do impact on the way that she perceives her east Germanness. The second part of the extract is perhaps the most telling, as she takes the same route as Franziska by pointing out that her experiences of the GDR were coincidental, and not at all related to political leanings or beliefs. Like Franziska, it appears that Sabine perceives that she is held responsible for her east German past. She repeatedly claims that the fact that she comes from the GDR is coincidental, that it is not a reflection of her parents' beliefs. The prejudiced perceptions that she believes westerners have towards easterners, therefore, do influence the way that Sabine presents her east Germanness to others. She evidently does not wish to deny her east Germanness, but also wishes to avoid falling prey to the ways that she perceives westerners to view easterners. This is illustrated by her rather hesitant claims that she discounts what, in her eyes, are ignorant clichés and stereotypes. Despite this claim, however, she then defensively emphasises that the fact that she was born in the GDR was a coincidence to underplay the impact that her GDR experiences have had on her.

While exasperation and resentment were commonly expressed in the participants' narratives about the label *Ossi*, they did not all respond to the term by significantly underplaying their east Germanness. Four of the twelve participants in this group agreed that westerners tend to stereotype the east, but expressed strong attachments to their east Germanness in spite of this. The following anecdote refers to a confrontation that one participant had with a westerner. The two women met a number of years ago at the football club where their sons play and see each other twice-weekly at the training sessions, and so

are reasonably well acquainted, but Claudia had not mentioned her east German background until this encounter. She describes her perceptions of the westerner's reaction:

Und das war so für mich so, dachte ich mir so 20 Jahre danach, du bist genauso alt wie ich, du warst auch 13 oder 14 und sagst du jetzt zu mir, was, du bist ein Ossi, als ob ich so, weißt du, so große Ohren, eine Schweinsnase im Gesicht habe, als ob ich deswegen jemand anderes bin. Das fand ich schon ein bisschen irgendwie nicht so toll, also es war schon ein bisschen beleidigend. [...] Ich dachte, ok ja, vorher hat man nicht gewusst, die dachten, weil wir sind aus Berlin, wohnen auch hier im Westteil, da ich sagte, ja klar, ja, wir kommen aus dem Ostteil halt.

(And for me it was like, I thought 20 years later, you're exactly the same age as me, you were 13 or 14 and now you say to me, what, you're an *Ossi*, as if I, you know, have these great big ears and a snout on my face, as if I'm somebody else. I really didn't find it so great, I mean, it was definitely a bit offensive. [...] I thought, right, okay, before nobody knew, they thought, because we come from Berlin and live here in the west, and I said, yeah, so, yeah, we come from the east.)

Claudia's reaction resembles the above responses to the apparently judgemental use of *Ossi* by westerners. Like Franziska and Sabine, she mocks the judgement, first by claiming how ridiculous such a categorisation is two decades after unification, and second by comparing the western perception of an easterner to the childish caricature of a mutant creature. Claudia's tone of voice throughout her narrative suggests that she became quite defensive during this encounter. She is not as reluctant as the other participants in affirming her east German background. Rather than deemphasising her GDR past, she responds by reiterating the fact that she grew up in the east. However, although she claims to have found the confrontation offensive, there is a lot of hesitation in the way that she defends her east Germanness. She explains that she found the experience 'not so great' and 'a bit offensive', so uses rather moderate language to express her offence. Claudia, then, like the other four participants in this group, does not underplay her east Germanness to the same extent as the other participants who responded defensively to the term *Ossi*. She does, however, agree that westerners frequently base their perceptions of easterners on what, in their eyes, are

inaccurate stereotypes.<sup>75</sup> It seems, therefore, that the participants' perceptions that the east is viewed negatively by the west, provokes them to underplay their east Germanness and present the east as simply another region in Germany, rather than an area which was previously a different political state.

### **Unification: A one-sided process**

The participants' claims that they face prejudice in unified Germany because of their east Germanness are particularly striking given that they personally believe their GDR experiences to benefit them in the Federal Republic. The analysis in chapter six demonstrated that, having experienced two social systems, the participants perceive themselves to be more insightful and open-minded German citizens than their western counterparts.<sup>76</sup> There is, then, significant conflict between their perceptions of their own east Germanness and the way that they believe that it is perceived by others. They consider themselves to hold attributes which put them in a beneficial position in post-unification Germany, but stress that these attributes are not appreciated or even acknowledged by the west. In fact, as shown by their narratives above, they claim that they are judged because of their east Germanness. This section deals with this conflict, specifically exploring the participants' narratives about the unification process. When discussing the way that unification was carried out, seventeen of the twenty participants claimed that more aspects of the GDR should have been

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<sup>75</sup> It should be noted that, when describing other easterners, the participants frequently draw on the same ideas that they are so frustrated about in their accounts about how westerners perceive easterners (see pp. 179-185 for arguments relating to consumer attitudes) and pp. 188-192 for arguments relating to *Ostalgie*). They depict older generations and those living outside of Berlin as being stuck in the past and heavily criticise them for failing to move forwards into the context of unified Germany. Notably, this characterisation did not match the participants' self-perceptions and none of them had ever come across an easterner who fitted the stereotype. Nonetheless, they were convinced that this group of *Ossis* or *ostalgic* easterners existed. There are, therefore significant tensions in the participants' narratives. The clichés that they use to describe easterners are the same ones that they criticise for being small-minded and ignorant when it comes to the way that, according to them, westerners view easterners. In this sense then, they may overcome the stereotypes when it comes to their own self-presentations. However, they are actually perpetuating the clichés of which they are so critical when it comes to constructing a broader perception of east Germanness.

<sup>76</sup> See pp. 219-230.

incorporated into unified Germany. They criticised the unification process for being too brash and ultimately overlooking the positive features of life under socialism. For example, Sabine explained to me that:

Als die Wende kam, wurde alles, was östlich war, erstmals niedergestampft, ohne zu gucken, ob es doch auch gute Dinge geben kann.

(When unification came, everything which was eastern was stamped out at first, without looking if there were actually also good things there.)

Sabine evidently felt disillusioned by the lack of balance in the unification process. In her view, all of the features of the GDR were removed and replaced with the western equivalent, and the possibility that some parts of the socialist system may have been better was not even entertained. She makes her criticism clear through the vocabulary that she employs. By using the word 'everything', she suggests that the west had too much of an influence over the unification process, and that the east should have played a bigger role. She emphasises the vehemence of the implementation of the western system through her use of the term 'stamp out', a verb most commonly used to refer to the elimination of something which is unlawful or dangerous. Sabine thus expresses that, in her view, completely eradicating the GDR as part of unification was too extreme. It is important to point out that Sabine was one of the participants who defensively underplayed her east Germanness when discussing how westerners perceive the east. This account, then, not only sheds light on how she views the unification process, but also highlights the tensions in her identity process. She does indeed identify as an easterner, and even problematises the unification process for overlooking potentially positive features of the east. However, when faced with apparent prejudice from westerners, Sabine appears to underplay her GDR upbringing as a means of rejecting the stereotypes which deprecate the east.

Among the seventeen participants who problematised the unification process for overlooking eastern attributes, seven of them provided more explicit and detailed narratives describing the difficulties that this had caused for easterners. Sonja, for example, claimed that the problems for the east do not necessarily come directly

from capitalist society, but from the failure of the unified German system to accept that there were positive features in the GDR. She went on to explain:

Die Frage ist, eben, warum hat man das nicht geschafft, [schöne Aspekte der DDR] rüberzuretten oder mitzunehmen in diese neue oder in diese...es war keine neue, das ist genau das Problem, glaube ich, dass es nach der Wende keine neue Gesellschaft gab, sondern die alte, in die die Ostdeutschen mithineingeraten sind. Schön wäre es gewesen vielleicht für viele Ostdeutsche, wenn das Ganze noch mal sich neu formiert hätte und eben auch viele Westdeutsche ein Interesse daran gezeigt hätten, oder mehr Westdeutsche sagen wir mal so, was in Ostdeutschland eigentlich das Leben ausgemacht hat, das Alltagsleben.

(The question is, why was it not possible to bring [nice aspects of the GDR] into this new or into this...it wasn't new, I think that's exactly the problem, that there wasn't a new society after unification, but the old one which easterners were slotted into. It would perhaps have been nice for many easterners if the whole thing had been newly reformed and also if lots of westerners had shown an interest in, or more westerners should I say, what life was actually like in east Germany, everyday life.)

As was the case with Sabine, Sonja expresses criticism towards the unification process for overlooking the positive aspects of the GDR. She goes on, however, to explain why she considers the unification process to have been problematic for easterners, providing two reasons in her account. First, she comments on the lack of compromise between the two systems, suggesting that the transition would have been less challenging for easterners if an entirely new system had emerged. By using the verb 'slot in' to describe the way that easterners became a part of the capitalist system, she infers that the process was not thought-through. Importantly, she uses the passive to describe this process, which indicates that, in her view, easterners had very little autonomy during the unification process. For Sonja, then, it seems that she problematises the one-sidedness of unification primarily for disadvantaging easterners. The consequences of losing the positive aspects of the GDR for unified German society are less prevalent in her arguments. This sentiment comes through most clearly at the end of her account. Here, she adds that it was not only the lack of compromise between the two systems which has created problems for easterners, but also the lack of interest in

the everyday life of the GDR among westerners. In Sonja's eyes, the whole process would have been smoother for easterners if more attention had been paid to their achievements under the socialist system.

The seventeen participants in this group all agreed that discarding all aspects of the former socialist state through the unification process created difficulties for easterners. Twelve of them, however, went one step further in their narratives, claiming that the unbalanced nature of the unification process disadvantaged not only easterners, but also unified Germany. In the following account, Stefan explains why he considers the unification process to have been a missed opportunity for Germany as a whole:

Ich habe zu Wendezeiten gesagt, die DDR hat sich überlebt, aber die Bundesrepublik, die hat sich eigentlich in dem Sinne so, wie sie funktioniert hat, auch überlebt. Die hätte genauso, oder vielleicht nicht genauso, aber sie hätte auch einen Wandel durchmachen müssen, um eine moderne Gesellschaft zu sein. Und das wurde...verschenkt, sage ich mal, diese Chance, und für mich auch eine historische Chance.

(At the time of unification I said, the GDR has had its time, but the Federal Republic, it had also in that sense, in the way that it worked, had also had its time. In exactly the same way it should have, or perhaps not in exactly the same way, but it also should have made a transition to become a modern society. And that was...given away, I mean, this chance, and for me also a historical chance.)

Particularly significant here is that Stefan's perceptions about the unification process are formed along the same lines as his views about how he personally was affected by it. It is useful to return to another extract from his interview which was used in chapter six. Describing that he is a more critical thinker because of his experiences of two systems, he claimed, 'I always say critical, those from the GDR, [...] they've got to know two systems and they can [...] compare and challenge western ideology'. So, when talking about himself he perceives that, having lived under two social systems, he is in a good position to contrast them and thus have more critical insights. His arguments about the advantages that contemporary Germany could potentially have reaped from unification are

very similar. In his view, if the east *and* the west had undergone transition, so if these dual experiences had been incorporated into unified Germany, then it would have become a more 'modern society'. It seems, therefore, that Stefan's perceptions of himself are intrinsically linked to his views of unified Germany. It is because he believes that he personally has benefited from drawing on experiences of two systems that he perceives Germany as a whole to have missed out by overlooking potentially positive aspects of the GDR.

### **Identifications with the GDR in the context of unified Germany**

Perhaps the most obvious question to arise from the participants' claims that some of the positive aspects of the GDR should have been maintained in unified Germany is which features should have been adopted. In response to this question, the participants referred to two aspects of society: consumption and socio-political structures dealing with state provisions and equality. The following sections explore how the participants discuss these issues in their narratives, focusing first on consumption and second on socio-political structures. The findings show that they conceptualise their understandings in the context of unified Germany. Importantly, they do not reject the western system, but suggest that it could be improved by adopting some of the values and structures which existed in the GDR.

#### Consumption

All twenty participants were critical towards the amount of consumption in unified Germany. This proportion is bigger than that which problematised the one-sidedness of the unification process, which means that this group did not always explicitly link the increase in consumption to the failure of unification to incorporate positive features of the GDR. As was noted in the section in chapter six about the participants' perceptions of the self as modest but sophisticated consumers, the focus on consumption during the interviews is likely to have played a role in its prevalence in the findings. Despite this, the participants'



narratives about consumption in the context of unified Germany shed useful light on how their attachments to the GDR feed into their perceptions of unified Germany. All of the participants expressed the same sentiments about western consumption; concerns about its prevalence and the expectations and lack of appreciation that this created, especially among children. The following extract, taken from Felix's interview, is typical of the participants' perceptions:

Heutzutage ist alles im Überfluss vorhanden, zu viel ist da, das Angebot ist zu groß [...] und so wirkt das natürlich vielmehr auf Kinder. [...] Damals warst du bescheidener irgendwie in deinen Ansprüchen und in dem, was du hast.

(Today everything is available in abundance, too much is there, the choice is too big [...] and that of course has much more of an effect on children. [...] Before you were more modest somehow in what you expected, and in what you had.)

Broadly speaking, the biggest problem for the participants in terms of consumption in unified Germany is that it is so prevalent in everyday life. They claim that consumer choice, and thus the desire to consume, is so great, that many people do not appreciate what they have. Felix's mention of children is also representative of the other interviews. The participants claimed that, while adults were able to look upon consumer choice more sensibly, children tended to be overwhelmed by the abundance of available products. They therefore fail to develop an appreciation for the value of goods and instead grow to have unrealistic expectations. Importantly, Felix negotiates his perceptions of consumption in unified Germany with his childhood experiences in the GDR. Talking about his upbringing in a society where there were frequently shortages of consumer goods, he claims that he was more modest than children in contemporary Germany. It seems then, that the participants view contemporary consumption within the same framework that they conceptualise their own attitudes to consumption. As a result of their GDR experiences, they perceive themselves as being more modest consumers. They criticise unified Germany for

being too orientated around consumption and thus failing to incorporate some of the consumer attitudes which they perceive existed in the GDR.

That the participants identified advantages about consumption under socialism, however, should not be taken as a sign that they reject western consumption. In fact, the participants claimed that, in many ways, the capitalist system was far better than the socialist one. They appreciated the fact that goods are readily available in unified Germany, but pointed out that the system also brought disadvantages. For example, Elisabeth explained:

Also früher waren es ja so Sachen, die ja auch schwer erhältlich waren, da musste man sehr lange darauf warten und heute, wenn man das Geld hat, geht man einfach und kauft es sich. [...] Der Vorteil ist, dass alles da ist. [...] Und der Nachteil ist [...] der Konsum, also für mich, das ist mir sehr konsumorientiert, alles.

(I mean, before there were things which were hard to get hold of, you had to wait a long time and today, if you've got the money, you just go and buy it. [...] The advantage is that everything's there. [...] And the disadvantage is [...] consumerism, I mean for me, it's very much orientated around consumerism, everything.)

The nuances in the participants' perceptions are very important. They show that the participants are pleased to live in a system where they have more consumer freedom than the GDR offered. However, they feel that the capitalist system in unified Germany goes to the extreme, and would benefit from being less orientated around consumption. Therefore, they by no means wish to return to a socialist system of consumption. This perception comes through clearly in the following extract, in which Sabine is talking about the enjoyment she gains from consuming in unified Germany:

C: Und kaufst du je ein Geschenk für dich selbst?

S: Für mich selbst? Ständig! [laughs].

C: Zum Beispiel?

A: Klamotten, Bücher – ich kaufe viele Bücher. [...] Ja, nein, ich tue mir was Gutes, ich tue mir was Gutes. [...] Wenn ich Stress hatte oder viel gearbeitet hatte, dann tue ich mir was Gutes.

(C: And do you ever buy a present for yourself?

A: For myself? All the time!

C: For example?

A: Clothes, books – I buy a lot of books. [...] Yeah, no, I treat myself, I treat myself. [...] When I'm stressed or have worked a lot, then I treat myself.)

Perhaps most striking here is that Sabine presents herself as a keen consumer, who does not only engage in consumption for necessities, but enjoys indulging in the social practice. Such anecdotes were common across the interviews. Taken together with the participants' claims about being modest consumers, there do appear to be tensions in their narratives. On the one hand, they present themselves as quite careful and frugal consumers, while on the other they claim that they enjoy treating themselves through consumption. It should be noted, however, that when discussing their modest approaches to shopping, the participants compared themselves to their western counterparts, claiming that they, as easterners, were less driven by consumer desire. The point here is that their perceptions are relative; they believe that they are more modest than westerners, but this does not mean that they do not enjoy consuming.

The participants' anecdotes about the enjoyment they gain from consumption in unified Germany also add a further strand to the argument that they do not reject the western system. This once again addresses the concerns raised by numerous scholars that east German perceptions are at odds with western norms, and thus jeopardise the inner unity of Germany. When it comes to the participants' ideas about consumption under capitalism, this is certainly not the case. They show a clear preference for the western system. However, in line with their self-perceptions, they assert that there is not enough modesty when it comes to shopping in unified Germany.

### Socio-political structures

The participants' perceptions of socio-political structures in unified Germany were similar to those about consumption, in that they were also nuanced and often stressed the benefits and flaws of both capitalism and socialism. The main difference between their narratives about consumption and those about socio-political structures was that the participants were markedly more hesitant when discussing the latter. This can be explained by the fact that politicised attachments to the GDR are a relatively more contentious issue in contemporary Germany than consumption. Therefore, it seems that the participants lack confidence when explaining their politicised identifications, or when critiquing the western system, for fear that they will be judged as showing an overall preference for socialism.

All seventeen of the participants in the group who problematised the one-sidedness of unification stated that the GDR was a more equal society and had better state provisions. The provisions that they referred to were most commonly related to the health system, childcare and opportunities for children to engage in leisure activities. The following extract from Felix's interview was a typical response:

Es gab ja auch gute Sachen in der DDR, beispielsweise das Gesundheitswesen, oder dass du..uh..nach der Schule wurdest du gefragt, was würdest du gerne machen wollen für einen Beruf [...] und du hast gesagt, du würdest gerne in dieser Richtung etwas machen, dann wurdest du unterstützt dahingehend.

(There were also good things in the GDR, for example the health system, or that you..um..once school was over you were asked, what job would you like to do [...] and you said, you'd like to do something in this direction, and then you were supported to that effect.)

It is important to point out that Felix only identifies distinctive aspects of the GDR as being positive in his narrative. His statement that 'there were *also* good things in the GDR' can be interpreted in two ways. First, in line with the participants' tendencies to respond defensively to the ways that they perceive the

west views the east, he suggests that others only see the negative, and is protesting that there also positive aspects to the GDR. Second, he is inferring that he does not see the GDR in a wholly positive light, but also believes that there were negative aspects to the socialist state. When discussing the advantages of GDR society, all of the participants specified certain aspects of GDR society, rather than expressing an overall preference for it. Although they favoured certain state provisions and claimed that there was more social equality under socialism, they are highly critical of the SED. This is significant, as it challenges an assumption which is prevalent in a considerable amount of literature on east Germanness. Numerous researchers claim that attachments to the GDR are akin to taking a rose-tinted view of socialism, and thus signify a rejection of unified Germany.<sup>77</sup> Reading the participants' narratives reveals that this is not the case; they are in fact highly critical of some aspects of the socialist state, as illustrated in more detail below. It is indeed reasonable to claim that they did tend to look upon some socio-political aspects more uncritically. In Felix's account above, for example, he suggests that most people were supported by the state when they decided on a specific career. It is, however, widely documented that education and career opportunities under socialism very much depended on political and state participation.<sup>78</sup> It is therefore unlikely that choosing a career path and being supported by the state was as simple as Felix suggests in his account. That some of their perceptions of the GDR are a little straightforward, however, does not mean that they reject contemporary Germany; they use their perceptions to critique some aspects of capitalism. The point they are making is that, in their eyes, unified Germany would be a better society if it had adopted *some* of the social structures from the GDR, such as the health and education system. According to the participants, they are in a better position to make such claims than westerners because they have experienced both systems. They are, therefore, not completely advocating or rejecting either system; their perceptions are far more refined than this. Instead, they are pinpointing features of both systems and

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<sup>77</sup> Goll and Leurer, for example, put forward these arguments, as explained on pp. 39-41.

<sup>78</sup> For example, see Heike Solga and Dirk Konietzka (1999) and Karl Schmitt (1975).

comparing them to construct nuanced perceptions of each system. This process actually enables the participants to be more critical of the west – they demonstrate that they are not advocating socialism through their critique of the east, and this appears to give their views of the west more legitimacy.

The following extract, which comes from Eva's interview, is a typical example of how the participants compare social equality in the GDR and in unified Germany:

Ja, alles, was mit sozialer Gerechtigkeit zu tun, das war auf jeden Fall im Osten besser, dass alle Menschen fast auf der gleichen Ebene waren, auch von dem Geld, was die verdient haben und so weiter.

(Yeah, everything to do with social equality was definitely better in the GDR, that all people were almost on the same level, also in terms of the money that they earned and so on.)

Like Felix, then, Eva pinpoints a specific aspect of the GDR as being better than unified Germany. She is using her experiences to critique the western system, but does not express an outright rejection of it. The criteria by which Eva measures social equality are also striking here – she uses economic income, a gauge which is more relevant to a capitalist society, to exemplify her claim that people were more equal in the GDR. Eva makes no mention of social and political contacts and professional skills, which were extremely valuable when it came to obtaining goods and services in the GDR.<sup>79</sup> Eva's perceptions are therefore formulated within the framework of the western system. This is not surprising, given that the 1970s generation have spent the whole of their adult lives living under capitalism. It does lend further weight, however, to the argument that the participants conceptualise their east Germanness as a part of their Germanness.

Looking more closely at other participants' narratives about the positive features of the GDR also substantiates the argument that they are heavily shaped by the ways that they perceive the east to be viewed in unified Germany. Seven of the

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<sup>79</sup> The important role played by contacts and professional skills when it came to obtaining goods and services in the GDR is outlined in the section on consumption in the literature review on pp. 26-29.

seventeen participants who identified benefits of the socialist system provided more detailed comparisons of the GDR and unified Germany. When discussing the advantages of the GDR, they generally provided lengthier and more hesitant narratives in which they were careful to account for the benefits and drawbacks of each system. The following account about educational equality, taken from Marie's interview, is typical of this group:

Heute betrifft ja dieses reich und arm sehr viele Leute, ja. Und deshalb ist es sozusagen eigentlich in der Masse schon ungerechter, weil eigentlich mit deiner Geburt ja schon entschieden wird, ob du studieren wirst oder nicht, ja, wenn du in einer Hartz IV-Familie aufwächst, hast du viel geringere Chancen, als wenn du in einer Akademikerfamilie aufwächst, ja. [...] Da [in der DDR] gab es die Chancengleichheit auch nicht, weil es sozusagen von politischen Komponenten abhängig war, ob du studieren durftest oder nicht. [...] Also von daher, würde ich nicht sagen, dass es damals besser war...weder besser noch schlechter, sondern auch ein anderes System, aber auch ein ungleiches System, was die Leute nicht gerecht behandelt halt auch.

(This rich and poor thing affects a lot of people today. Therefore it's actually more unfair for the majority because by your birth it's actually already been decided whether you will study or not, yeah, if you grow up in a *Hartz IV* family you have far lower chances than if you grow up in an academic family, yeah. [...] There were not equal opportunities there [in the GDR] either because whether you could study or not was dependent on political factors. [...] So, from that perspective I wouldn't say that it was better back then, neither better nor worse, but it was another system, also an unequal system that didn't treat people fairly.)

The main difference between Marie's narrative and those analysed above is that she contrasts and critiques both unified Germany *and* the GDR. She does not show a preference for either educational system, but rather distinguishes them as separate systems with their own flaws. Her hesitance indicates that she thinks carefully about how she constructs her narrative, warily stating that the GDR was (and therefore that unified Germany is), 'neither better nor worse, but it was another system'. It seems, then, that her narrative is embroiled in the ways that the participants perceive popular perceptions of attachments to the GDR. She evidently perceives some aspects of the GDR to be comparatively better, but is not confident in asserting these benefits. This tendency was also seen in the

participants' narratives about their responses to the term *Ossi*. Although they claimed that they were frustrated by this apparent judgement, they were not forthright in asserting their east Germanness in the face of it. It seems, then, that the participants also fear judgement when discussing socio-political aspects of the GDR that they perceive to be better than unified Germany.

This tendency also comes through in the following extract, which is taken from Stefan's interview. In this case, he not only hesitantly explains why he believes the education system in the GDR was fairer, but also explicitly points out that he does not glorify the socialist state:

Also ich finde, dass es positive Sachen gab in der DDR, aber von so einer Glorifizierung oder so halte ich nichts. [...] Das, was für mich persönlich positiv war, es war...eine relative, also die Bildungschancen waren gleicher als sie jetzt sind. Also dieser Spagat, diese Schere, die jetzt auseinander spaltet, die möchte ich behaupten, die gab's da nicht. Das Problem zu DDR-Zeiten war, dass du schwerer hattest, in ein Studium zu kommen, wenn deine Eltern nicht in der Partei waren oder irgendwelche Funktionäre oder du selber gesagt hast, dass du da nicht mitspielst, dann hat man sich eigentlich relativ schnell einen Stein in den Weg gelegt. Das war irgendwie das nicht so Schöne dabei. Aber dass es jetzt schon [im Schulwesen] so früh aussortiert wird, so wie jetzt, das war in der DDR nicht der Fall.

I mean, I think that there were positive things in the GDR, but I don't support a kind of glorification or anything like that. [...] That, what was positive for me personally was, it was...a relatively, I mean, educational opportunities were fairer than they are now. I mean, this split, this division that now separates people from one another, I'd like to claim that didn't exist there. The problem in the time of the GDR was that it was difficult to do a degree if your parents weren't in the party or some kind of functionaries or if you said yourself that you weren't going to play along, then you had lay a stone in your way relatively quickly. That was somehow the not so nice aspect of it. But that [schools] are streamed so early now, that wasn't the case in the GDR.)

The structure of Stefan's narrative makes it clear that he lacks confidence when explaining why he believes the education system in the former east was fairer. He repeatedly pauses and says, 'I mean' so as to buy himself time to formulate his views. To moderate his views he uses the term, 'relatively', and softens his point



by saying, 'for me personally'. What is more, he explicitly claims that his views should not be read as glorification, stating that he does not 'support' such a thing. There is a tension here because, to some degree, Stefan actually does appear to be glorifying this aspect of the GDR. Like Felix above, he rather simplifies the education system in the GDR by claiming that it was fairer despite the issue of political involvement. It seems that, by explicitly distancing his perceptions from glorification, Stefan feels more comfortable in expressing that he found some aspects of the GDR to be better. What is more, Felix appears to be using his critique of the east to obscure his criticism of the west. He draws on his experiences of two systems to construct a more 'balanced' critique of the west, which prevents his views from being read as *ostalgic* or rose-tinted.

The main point to come from this analysis relates to how their perceptions of the ways that others, namely westerners, view the east, heavily influence how they articulate their own understandings. On the one hand, they feel that unified Germany would have benefited if it had adopted more features of the GDR. They perceive themselves to be in a good position to make these points because they have experienced two systems. Despite this, however, their narratives demonstrate that they are actually very hesitant and careful when discussing their perceptions of the positive features of the GDR, or when criticising the west. This finding reveals that the way in which they articulate their east Germanness is shaped significantly by their perceptions that the GDR is generally problematised in unified Germany. It seems that, because of this overarching discourse, the participants are not confident in asserting their views about the benefits of the socialist system.

### **Acceptance of the east in unified Germany**

The final point to be made in this chapter relates to the ways that the participants believe that western perceptions of the east have shifted since unification. The analysis up to this point has shown that, on the whole, the participants believe that east Germanness, along with the GDR, is seen in an entirely negative light. It

would be misleading to argue, however, that these perceptions are consistent across time. In line with the constructivist framework for the thesis, the participants frequently suggested, either implicitly or explicitly, that popular perceptions of the east have changed during the twenty years since unification. In a broader sense, these perceptions emerged from the generational distinctions that the participants made throughout their interviews, and which have framed many of the conclusive arguments in the thesis. They frequently differentiated between older easterners and westerners and their own generation, so those born in the 1970s. They claimed that the east-west distinction is more prevalent among older generations, while younger Germans tend to view Germany as a whole. They also maintained that the problematic stereotypes and popular perceptions about east Germans are primarily held by older generation westerners, and affirmed by older generation easterners. In short, they perceive their own generation to be more forward-looking and accepting than Germans born before the 1970s. These perceptions should undoubtedly be interpreted critically – analysing the implicit meanings and linguistic structure of the participants' narratives suggests that they are not as free from the popular perceptions as they believe. That they engage in these perceptions to make sense of older generations, for example, indicates that they do indeed play a role in the participants' understandings. The focus of this thesis, however, is what *the participants* perceive to be the case. It is these perceptions which feed into the way that they negotiate and present their own east Germanness in unified Germany.

The participants' assertions that the east is less often problematised in contemporary Germany do not mean, however, that they perceive it to be completely accepted. From their viewpoints there is still a reasonable way to go, however there has been a marked improvement in the situation since the early 1990s. The following extract from Julia's narrative neatly sums up these participants' perceptions:

C: Also was meinst du mit Akzeptanz?

J: Also diese Vergangenheit im Osten sozusagen, dass nicht alles als negativ gesehen wird, sondern dass auch einige Sachen mit in das neue Deutschland genommen werden. Das finde ich gut.

C: Vorher wird denn alles als negativ gesehen?

J: Ja. Alles. Erziehung, politisch, finanziell, alles wurde erstmal..ja.

C: Und jetzt?

J: Ich finde, das ist im Wandel, ja, immer mehr, ja.

(C: I mean, what do you mean by acceptance?)

J: I mean, this eastern past, that it's not all seen as negative, but that some aspects are also being taken on in the new Germany. I find that good.

C: Before was everything seen negatively?

J: Yes. Everything. Education, politics, economy, everything was at first, yeah.

C: And now?

J: I find that now it's in transition, yeah, more and more, yeah.)

When I asked Julia to elaborate on her claim that there were more signs of acceptance in unified Germany, she usefully summed up how she believes perceptions have changed since unification. For her, the GDR is no longer considered as completely negative, but some of its positive features are beginning to be acknowledged in unified Germany. Further reading of her interview indicates that, for her, this is not only occurring in the broader context of unified Germany, but also in one-to-one interactions with westerners. She went on to explain:

Dass man mehr akzeptiert wird als...von den alten Bundesländern. Und dass das jetzt mal nachgefragt wird und nicht gleich polarisiert wird. Es wird nachgefragt, also wenn ich jetzt in meinem Freundeskreis...ist es so, dass ich oft...also Fragen, auch provokante Fragen bekomme oder ich werde mit Vorurteilen konfrontiert und ich aber sofort zurückfeuer und das wird aber dann auch drauf eingegangen. Es wird nicht einfach dann...oh man, was hat sie wieder, typisch Ossi, sondern es wird nachgefragt, was dahintersteckt.

(That you're more accepted than...by the old *Länder*. And that now it's asked about rather than polarised straightaway. It's asked about, now when I'm with my group of friends...it's like, I often...I mean I'm often asked

questions, provocative questions as well, or confronted with prejudices but I fire straight back and it actually goes in. It's not then, here we go, what's up with her now, typical *Ossi*, but it's asked about, what's behind it.)

Perceptions relating to one-to-one interactions are particularly important, as they concern the participants' perceived abilities to communicate their own understandings in their day-to-day experiences. This is very significant to the participants' own identity processes. As has been argued in this chapter, and more broadly throughout this thesis, they often perceive their own east Germanness to be misunderstood in the context of unified Germany. In their view, their east Germanness is commonly misconstrued and deprecated. They are frustrated by this because they consider themselves to actually be in an advantageous position. They believe that they put their experiences of the GDR to good use in the context of unified Germany. Given their enthusiastic responses to this project and their eagerness in engaging in detailed discussions about their past during the interviews, it seems that they are keen to have their perceptions heard. They do not only wish for their east Germanness to be more accepted, but for their positive attributes to be acknowledged. That the participants believe that westerners are making positive steps towards understanding how easterners themselves perceive the east is likely to influence the participants' own perceptions east Germanness. In terms of their self-presentations, they are likely to be more confident in asserting their east Germanness and to feel less fenced in by popular perceptions of the east. This, in turn, may mean that the participants are less likely to rely on popular discourse in their explanations about other easterners. In time, then, it is possible that the resonance of the negative popular perceptions of the east will decrease.

## Conclusion

This chapter has explored east Germanness in the context of unified Germany from two perspectives. First, it looked at how the participants believe that the east is generally perceived in contemporary Germany, so primarily by westerners. Second, it analysed what the participants' narratives reveal about

their own perceptions of the unified state, and how these perceptions are shaped by the ways that they believe that the east is perceived. Throughout their interviews, the participants overwhelmingly claimed that the east is seen in a negative light by westerners, and that problematic stereotypes about easterners serve to challenge and undermine their east Germanness. Looking closely at their anecdotes about one-to-one interaction with westerners revealed that they tend to become defensive when confronted with clichés about the east. As a consequence, they are torn between a desire to express an attachment to their GDR past and underplaying their east Germanness to avoid being pigeonholed negatively. Most of the participants self-presentations were profoundly affected by the stereotypes, in that they tended to deemphasise their east Germanness. Only a small number of them suggested that they confidently affirmed the significance of their past in spite of the clichés when it came to one-one interactions with westerners.

These apparently negative perceptions of the east are particularly frustrating for the participants because, in their eyes, they actually have experiences which hold them in better stead than westerners in unified Germany. This links to the analysis about the advantages of having experienced two social systems in chapter six. They consider themselves to hold a wealth of skills and insights which they can put to good use *in the context of unified Germany*. Therefore, they do not only criticise the apparent failure of the west to accept east Germanness, but also their lack of appreciation for the benefits that they bring to contemporary Germany. In line with their perceptions that the east tends to be viewed in a negative light in Germany, however, their criticisms frequently lacked confidence. Instead, their narratives which critiqued the west and highlighted the positive aspects of the GDR were structured very carefully, as illustrated by the large degree of hesitation and uses of very moderate language.

The findings about their own positive attributes have strong correlations with their claims about the one-sidedness of the unification process. Over three-quarters of the participants explained that the positive features of the GDR had been completely overlooked during unification, and thus entirely eradicated in

unified Germany. This is firstly problematic for easterners themselves, as it made the unification process much more challenging to come to terms with. According to a number of the participants, it is also problematic for German society. First, it would benefit from adopting a more modest approach to consumption, which the participants claim existed in the GDR. They perceive that unified Germany has also missed out on a number of socio-political structures that the participants claim were of a higher standard.

Another finding to emerge from the participants' accounts about the ways that the east is perceived by others, however, signified that they believe that the west is slowly opening up and listening to 'alternative' conceptions of the east. For the participants, this acceptance can be seen in two ways – first through the acknowledgement of positive aspects of the GDR, and second through a heightened interest in the GDR and reduction in prejudice among westerners. This finding is highly significant in terms of the participants' identity processes, and potentially also perceptions of the east in unified Germany. Perceptions that the east is being seen in less of a negative light are likely to lead the participants to be less defensive about their east Germanness when it comes to one-to-one interaction with westerners. If they believe that their audience has a genuine interest in their views, then they are more likely to express their more nuanced politicised attachments to the GDR without fearing that they will be confronted with stereotypical prejudice. This, in turn, may mean that more 'alternative' understandings of the east would be audible in the public sphere, and thus go some way to alleviating the stereotypes. This has potentially important consequences for east Germanness in unified Germany. First, the stereotypes themselves would have less of an influence over popular perceptions. Second, if the stereotypes had less influence, then the participants themselves would be less likely to engage with them, and thus perpetuate them, when negotiating their more generic perceptions of east Germanness.

## Conclusions

The main aim of this project was to research how people born in GDR in the 1970s make sense of and construct their identities. The thesis has explored if and how this group engage with the different (largely negative) popular perceptions of the east when talking about themselves, about those with whom they have personal contact and about a more generic group of easterners whom they have never met. This approach challenges the assertion that east Germanness poses a problem to German unity, which pervades much existing research in the field. It has also broken from the tendency to focus on popular representations of the east as a means of understanding east Germanness. Instead, it demonstrates how easterners themselves negotiate these mainstream representations in different forms of social interaction, and how dominant ideas have affected their perceptions of the east. The approach has therefore also revealed 'alternative' understandings of the east, that is to say perceptions which do not correspond to existing mainstream representations. The qualitative interpretive approach which has been adopted here has therefore provided comprehensive insights into the intricate construction of the participants' identities. As the study stands, these findings are not generalisable, that is to say they are restricted to the participants who took part in the study. The in-depth, and in some cases new, conclusions which have been drawn from the research could, however, form the basis of new quantitative research in the field, which would produce generalisable data on a bigger sample of the east. They provide a framework for new hypotheses on the east, which would focus on the perceptions of easterners themselves, rather than their representation in broader discourse.

Before concluding the findings of this thesis, it is useful to briefly reiterate how the east is popularly represented in unified Germany. Almost all researchers in the field agree that the east-west distinction is central to the construction of eastern identities (see Boyer, 2000; Weidenfeld, 1993; Ueltzhöffer, 1993; Glaab, 2002; Klein, 2004 among others). Manfred Schmitt and Jürgen Maes (2002), who focus specifically on the role that the east-west distinction has played in shaping

east Germanness in their work, claim that, 'East and West are chronically available social categories in the minds of Germans' (p. 310). They go on to explain that

they serve as categories in virtually every public statistic (e.g. of crime and unemployment), in media reports and comments on cultural, economic, and political events, in political campaigns and elections, in sports, and in many other domains of public life. In most of these mass communication contexts, East Germany and East Germans are explicitly or implicitly portrayed as inferior in some sense to West Germans (ibid.).

The two most important points to be drawn from this quotation are that east and west act as dominant social categories and that the east generally comes off worse in the comparison. Broadly speaking, mainstream representations depict easterners as being too attached to their GDR past, and therefore failing to accept the norms of unified Germany. They are painted as unable to get to grips with democracy or a market economy, as struggling to manage money and as being ungrateful for the financial aid they have received since unification (Belke, 2009, p. 175).

The dominance of such negative discourse about the east is said to significantly restrict the emergence of positive eastern perceptions into the public sphere. It is useful to return to John Theobald's work on post-unification perceptions of the east here, as he neatly summarises the most common popular responses to positive attachments to the GDR past:

The overwhelming consensual trend since 1990 has been to discredit the memory of the GDR and to diminish respect for all that it – and that includes its people – set out to realize in its 40 years of existence. When alternatives to this approach are advanced, they are – 'on message' with hegemonic discourse – generally dismissed as Ostalgie or as irrelevant and unrealistic speculation (2000, p. 131).

Theobald agrees that, since the fall of the Wall, hegemonic discourse has tended to paint the GDR in a negative light. The influence of these ideas is claimed to be such, that any attempts to counter them are met with exasperation and



interpreted as wistful and backward-looking, or as *ostalgic*. In short, east German perceptions which do not correspond with the mainstream view that the east is inferior to the west may struggle to emerge in the public sphere because they are misread, and even undermined, by *Ostalgie*.

As may be expected given the claims in existing literature, the east-west distinction underpins the overall conclusions for the thesis. This distinction appears to act as an unavoidable framework for the ways that the participants make sense of their own and others' east Germanness. What the thesis has shown, however, is the nuanced ways in which the power of the distinction shifts and plays out in different forms of interaction.

The distinction was more prominent in the participants' perceptions of others than in their perceptions of the self. When discussing other easterners the participants relied heavily on both the distinction and the stereotypical meanings behind the labels. The participants initially defined *all* easterners whom they had never met according to mainstream ideas about the east. They did, however, differentiate their responses when I probed further, asking if these labels were suitable for the eastern population in general. They then claimed that, with further thought, easterners of their own generation were less likely to fulfil the stereotypes, but that they were certainly fitting for older generations. They broadly describe this group as being stuck in the past and incapable of grasping the norms and values of a capitalist consumer society. Importantly, they also positioned these 'eastern' characteristics as directly contrasting with 'western' characteristics, consistently suggesting that the east and west can be understood as polar opposites. They therefore implicitly accepted the conventional wisdom of the *Mauer im Kopf*. It is in the context of describing easterners whom the participants have never met that the distinction appears to have the most influence. It determines both the categories they use to make sense of difference and the behaviours that they associate with different groups.

However, they do not always accept the distinction completely, in that they only apply it in an unmodified way when discussing strangers. Inevitably, they were

more differentiated and nuanced when it came to people with whom they have personal contact. When discussing this group, the participants claimed without exception that they had never personally met anyone who fulfilled the 'eastern' stereotype. Therefore, their personal experiences of other easterners counterbalanced the mainstream perceptions of the east when they defined this group. This finding does, however, emphasise the dominance of the east-west distinction in the participants' perceptions of those whom they have never met. Despite the fact that the participants have never met a stereotypically 'eastern' easterner, the distinction and the meanings attached to the labels are so influential that they supersede the participants' own experiences and cause them to contradict themselves. Furthermore, the participants tended to interpret easterners who do not fit into the stereotype as an exception to the rule, which suggests that the popular notions of the east determines their expectations about others' behaviour.

When it came to discussing themselves, the role of the east-west distinction shifted significantly. They continued to work within the conventional east-west framework here, using the west as a point of comparison to present their east Germanness as a distinctive identity. However, as may be expected, they rejected the negative stereotypes and redefined the meaning of 'eastern' to construct a form of east Germanness made up of positive characteristics. They therefore accepted, and indeed made use of, the distinction in their own identity processes, but negotiated the meanings commonly associated with the eastern label to construct an identity by which they could define themselves.

The thesis not only addressed how the influence of the east-west distinction shifts in different forms of social interaction, but also the means by which the participants negotiate the distinction and the stereotypes behind it. Generation emerged as a key tool for the participants in this negotiation process. All of them used this social marker to differentiate the eastern population and thus constructed two distinctive groups within the east: the 1970s generation (or themselves) and older easterners. This differentiation served two purposes in their identity processes. First, they used it to distance themselves from negative

stereotypes about the east by claiming that these were exclusive to older generation easterners. In this sense, generation acted as a shield for the participants; they use it as a tool to construct a more positive idea of east Germanness and thus avoid the negative dominant perceptions of the east. Second, the participants set 1970s generation east Germanness apart from 'other' eastern identities. They claimed that they are old enough to have benefited from growing up in the GDR, but young enough to be able to make use of these experiences in unified Germany. It is useful to reiterate the significance of GDR experiences here; the participants are not denying their east Germanness, but redefining what it means. By using generation to construct a 'positive' form of east Germanness, the participants are suggesting that they hold a more advantageous position in unified Germany than both westerners and older generation easterners. Unlike westerners, they have experienced the GDR, and unlike older generation easterners, they are young enough to make use of these experiences in a capitalist context.

Questions which have not yet been addressed are which characteristics make up this redefined form of east Germanness and where the participants believe these characteristics come from. The term 'critical capitalist' is the most appropriate to describe how the participants see their GDR past feeding into their identities in unified Germany. They claim that, unlike older generation easterners, they are as accomplished and competent in the ways of capitalism as their western counterparts. When it comes to shopping, they believe that they recognise the value of high quality goods in terms of both value for money and presenting the self to others. In short, they view themselves as sophisticated and relatively refined shoppers. What sets them apart from westerners, who, according to the participants' perceptions, can be labelled as relatively 'uncritical capitalists', is their socialisation in a society which, in their eyes, had a stronger sense of community and togetherness. As a result of these experiences, they consider themselves still to have a stronger sense of community, to prioritise personal relationships over career and to be comparatively modest consumers. Taken as a whole, the participants' self-perceptions as consumers correspond to the idea of

post-materialism, which, importantly, is firmly rooted in a capitalist context. This paradox leads to an important conclusion; the distinction between their redefined east Germanness and perceptions of west Germanness is not as great as they suggest. On the whole, their east Germanness actually fits neatly into the norms and values of the west (or of unified Germany). The participants do not, however, view their eastern identities to correspond to western norms and values. They view themselves to be more distinctive than their perceived values suggest they are. They claim that attitudes, such as a sense of social solidarity, put them in a better position than their western counterparts, as they enable them to see and to some degree overcome what they consider to be the shortcomings of capitalism. They are able to compare socialism and capitalism critically, and incorporate the benefits of each system into their own lives in unified Germany.

The way in which the participants make use of their dual experiences to critique capitalism is also worth noting. They consistently comment on both socialism and capitalism when discussing aspects of capitalism which they perceive to be problematic. For example, when talking about the education system, they were careful to acknowledge the shortcomings of the GDR, such as favouritism for families involved in the SED, before criticising the western system. This served two purposes. First, it ensured that their views were not read as the glorification of the GDR. Second, it enabled them to present their criticism of capitalism, which at times was quite strong, as more balanced and moderate. In this sense, they appeared to conceal their criticism of capitalism with their criticism of socialism.

It is particularly significant that the participants understand their east Germanness to stem from their experiences of growing up in the GDR. In their eyes, the ideas which make up their east Germanness, such as a strong sense of community and a modest approach to consumerism, link strongly to the collectivist norms and values which existed in the GDR. In this sense then, the participants' perceptions of east Germanness can be described as a diluted form of socialist ideology. They appear to have taken politicised socialist identity, moderated its characteristics to correspond to a capitalist context, and thereby

also turned it into a social identity. It seems, therefore, that the participants' own east Germanness cannot be described as a straightforward response to the idea of post-unification western superiority. It is indeed partly formed in opposition to the west, as the participants use the west to distinguish their east Germanness. This is not surprising given that the social categories of east and west have been prevalent German norms since unification, and before that dominated as socio-political categories. Their east Germanness does not, however, correspond to existing claims about the *zweite-Klasse-Mentalität*, which is said to have resulted in a *Trotzidentität* (see Flockton, 1999; Hogwood, 2000; Charles Ross, 2002 among others). The participants' experiences of growing up in the GDR seem to have influenced their ideas of east Germanness more than any form of inferiority complex which is said to have come from the east-west distinction. What is more, they do not present themselves as victims in their identity processes, but as a group which shares in positive attributes because of their experiences of socialism. They do not perceive themselves as second class citizens, but as German citizens who have a lot to offer unified Germany because of their dual experiences. This is not to say that the assertions made in existing research that the east is commonly perceived as being inferior to the west have not been borne out by the findings of this thesis. As explained below, these external perceptions significantly influence the ways that the participants present themselves, particularly when they are discussing interaction with westerners. The point is that they do not see *themselves* as inferior to the west, but actually as a group with superior values.

The concept of *Ossi-pride* (Hogwood, 2000) is therefore more useful for understanding the participants' perceptions of east Germanness. Hogwood defines this idea as 'easterners' attempt to adapt the negative Ossi stereotype to a positive focus' (p. 59). This definition fits quite neatly with the findings of the thesis. The participants redefine mainstream, often negative perceptions of the east to construct a form of east Germanness which, first, challenges problematic conceptions of the east, and, second, corresponds more closely to the norms and values of unified Germany. The concept does not, however, completely explain

the participants' identities. First, Hogwood maintains that the behaviours and attitudes associated with *Ossi*-pride are generally 'characteristic of easterners' (ibid.). This idea of a uniform eastern identity is not present in the participants' narratives. As explained above, they only positively redefine east Germanness when discussing themselves and those in their generation – older easterners are consistently described in line with negative dominant perceptions of the east. Second, it is misleading to explain their positive perceptions of the east as a straightforward 'reactive [...] identity' (ibid.) to western superiority. The participants do indeed use the west as a point of comparison in order to distinguish their east Germanness. However, as pointed out above, their narratives on their perceptions of their own east Germanness are based more on their GDR biographies than western perceptions of the east.

The idea that the participants' identities are rooted in their GDR upbringings also suggests that east Germanness of this kind will cease to exist in unified Germany in coming generations. This issue was in fact discussed at length by participants who have children. They maintained that, although ideally they would like to bring their own children up to have the same attitudes as themselves, it is impossible to do so when the children are being socialised in a capitalist society. These findings should go some way to allaying the fears of the researchers who maintain that a continued sense of east Germanness jeopardises German unity (Gensicke, 1995, 1998; Reißig, 2000; Dorbritz, 1997). First, as explained above, their identities appear to fit into the capitalist context of east Germany – they are indeed critical of *some* aspects of it, but they by no means reject it altogether. Second, it is likely that eastern identities do in fact have a limited life span and will gradually become less and less prevalent.

The findings clearly demonstrate, therefore, that the participants are more likely to negotiate the negative perceptions that the east-west distinction entails in their own identity processes than when constructing perceptions of others. Nevertheless, it is misleading to conclude that they are entirely free of the dominant ideas about the east in their narratives about the self. It is here that the title of the thesis is most relevant – the participants do, at least to some degree,

feel ‘fenced in’ by the negative stereotypes and clichés about the east. By and large, the participants are trapped in the prevailing discourse about east Germany, which suggests that in the broader context of identity studies, this thesis supports the postmodern perspective.<sup>80</sup> The construction of their narratives about the benefits of being east German, particularly in their self-presentations as easterners, is entirely dependent on the idea of east-west difference – in order to express a sense of east Germanness, the participants must engage with the dominant discourse and locate themselves with reference to the west. Given that the east is portrayed as the inferior group in this comparison, it is perhaps unsurprising that the participants’ assertions are embroiled in the idea that attachments to the east are problematic. Their claims are very hesitant and consist of a large number of phrases to moderate their views, which suggests that they are held back by the fear that they will be negatively judged for holding positive attachments to the GDR. It is, therefore, perhaps here that the idea of the *zweite-Klasse-Mentalität* is more relevant – it does not shape the way that the participants redefine their own perceptions of their east-Germanness, but does influence their ability to express them. It also seems that, as Theobald claims above, the dominant ideas which problematise east Germanness do indeed leave little room for positive perceptions of the socialist state to emerge. The participants consistently justify their views in an attempt to ensure they are not read as *ostalgie*, or as unrealistic and wistful memories about the past. Furthermore, they seem to conform to the mainstream perceptions of which they are so critical in their own identity processes by drawing upon them to define other easterners. This, once again, may indicate the dominance of these ideas; in order to demonstrate that they are accomplished in the ways of contemporary Germany, they fall into line with the norm of criticising the east. It appears that for them to be able to present their own ‘alternative’ perceptions of being east German as a part of their Germanness, they need to engage with the mainstream negative

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<sup>80</sup> The section on power relations in the second chapter (pp. 67-71) outlines the postmodern-constructionist debate. In short, constructionist theorists tend to highlight individuals as agents in the construction of their identities, while those taking a postmodern perspective underline the power of overarching discourse, therefore suggesting that individuals have little agency, but are bound by the dominant idea which frame social meanings.

discourse about the east. In short, in their bids to ensure they are not fenced in by the discourse, they are ultimately fencing in other easterners. It seems then, that the cost of retaining positive east German values is that the participants may be hindering the development of an 'alternative' discourse on the east. Instead, they are helping to perpetuate the negative stereotypes which they go to great lengths to avoid in their own identity processes.



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# Appendices

## **Waren Sie in der siebziger Jahre in der DDR geboren?**

Ich habe 2006-2007 an der Berlin Metropolitan School als Sprachassistentin gearbeitet, und habe danach eine Doktorarbeit an der University of Bath in England angefangen. Meine Forschung geht um Einstellungen zu Konsum, insbesondere Geschenke, in den neuen Ländern. Ich möchte Teilnehmer, die während der siebziger Jahre in der DDR geboren wurden, zu interviewen. Das Interview dauert ungefähr eine Stunde. Wenn Sie sich dafür interessieren (oder jemanden kennen, der sich dafür interessieren könnte), an dieser Studie teilzunehmen, schicken Sie mir bitte ein Email. Ich würde mich freuen, von Ihnen zu hören.

**Claire Hyland (Doktorandin der Germanistik,  
University of Bath, UK)**

**Email: [C.L.Hyland@bath.ac.uk](mailto:C.L.Hyland@bath.ac.uk)**

## **Were you born in the GDR in the 1970s?**

I worked as a language assistant for the Berlin Metropolitan School between 2006 and 2007, and went on to start a PhD at the University of Bath in England. My research looks at attitudes to consumerism, in particular gifts, in the new states. I am looking for participants who were born in the GDR during the 1970s to interview. The interview lasts about an hour. If you are interested in taking part in this study (or know anyone who may be interested), please send me an email. I look forward to hearing from you.

**Claire Hyland (PhD candidate in German Studies,  
University of Bath, UK)**

**Email: [C.L.Hyland@bath.ac.uk](mailto:C.L.Hyland@bath.ac.uk)**

### Appendix 3: Participants' backgrounds

#### Daniel

Daniel was born in 1975, so was fourteen years old when the Wall fell and thirty four years old when the interview was carried out. He grew up in Brandenburg and moved to Berlin when he was nineteen years old. Daniel is married to an east German and does not have any children. He works as a personal assistant for a member of the *Bundestag* (the German Parliament) and appears to have a relatively comfortable lifestyle – he mentioned being financially able to treat himself to computing products for his hobby a number of times in the interview. During the interview Daniel was quite concise in his responses, and I often prompted him for more detail. Despite this, however, he was also one of the more reflective participants and frequently paused to think over his answers.

#### Jan

Jan was born in 1980, and so is one of the youngest participants. He was nine years old when the Wall fell and thirty years old at the time of interview. He grew up in Berlin and continues to live there now, but spent eighteen months living in Nuremberg between 2000 and 2002. Jan is single and does not have any children. He works as a caretaker at a primary school in Berlin, and so has one of the lowest incomes of all of the participants. Although Jan mentioned facing financial difficulties when looking for a flat in Berlin, he considers himself to be in a better financial position than his parents' generation, many of whom he claims are unemployed. Jan was one of the least reflective participants – he often responded to my more in-depth questions with the phrase, 'I've never thought about it', and had comparatively fewer opinions about east Germanness. This may be explained by his age, and also by the fact that is relatively less educated than the other participants.

#### Claudia

Claudia was born in 1975, so she was fifteen years old when the Wall fell and thirty six years old when the interview took place. She grew up in a small village in Brandenburg and moved to Berlin in 1996. Claudia is married (to Felix, who was also interviewed) and has a seven year old son and eighteen month old daughter. She was on maternity leave when I spoke to her, and planned to return

to her job, working in customer services for a bank, in spring 2010. She and her husband appear to have a reasonably comfortable lifestyle – she consistently defined herself as a modest consumer, but also claimed that this was not because of financial restrictions. Claudia was by far one of the most reflective participants – her interview lasted for almost two hours because she gave such detailed responses and often paused to think about her answers.

### Felix

Felix, who is married to Claudia, was born in 1975, so was fifteen years old when the Wall fell and thirty six years old when the interview took place. He grew up in Köpenick, which is on the outskirts of Berlin, and has lived in the south of the city since 1999. He has a seven year old son and eighteen month old daughter and works as a judicial clerk. His narrative suggested that he has a relatively comfortable lifestyle – he claimed, for example, that he could afford to buy his children more than they have, but is hesitant to do so because he is keen for them to learn the value of money. Felix was one of the most animated participants during his interview – he was eager to tell his story and frequently explained his views with anecdotes about his experiences.

### Christian

Christian was born in 1971, and so is one of the oldest participants. He was eighteen years old when the Wall fell and thirty nine years old when the interview took place. He lived in the Erzgebirge, a region on the border with the Czech Republic, until 1978 when he moved to Berlin, where he continues to live. Christian is single, does not have any children and has owned a small espresso bar in the centre of Berlin since 2006. Before this he spent ten years studying European ethnology. His income from his business is relatively modest – at the beginning of the interview he explained that it had been a financial struggle to start his business, but that the situation was beginning to look better. Christian was extremely reflective during his interview, which is reflected by the fact that it lasted just over two hours. He has a lot of memories of the GDR, which he was eager to share, and is also enjoys reading about developments in Germany since unification. As a result he is comparatively knowledgeable about the historical context of the GDR and the politics of unification.

### Stefan

Stefan was born in 1970, so is the oldest participant. He was nineteen years old when the Wall fell and forty years old when the interview took place. He grew up in Dresden and moved to the western outskirts of Berlin in 1998. He is in the third year of training to be a Kindergarten teacher and is separated from his partner, with whom he has three children (a nine year old son and two daughters, aged six and three years old). As a student-teacher with three children, he has one of the lowest incomes among the participants. Stefan expressed some of the strongest opinions in his interviews, particularly when it came to discussing easterners of older generations who he claims tend to be stuck in the GDR past. His responses were not, however, as reflective as those of other participants – his narrative was quite short when I prompted him for further detail about his views.

### Sabine

Sabine was born in 1980, and so is one of the youngest participants. She was nine years old when the Wall fell, and twenty nine when the interview took place. She grew up in Berlin, where she continues to live with her partner and has no children. She completed her degree in music and education in 2006, when she began teaching in a primary school. She is now in the first year of the second part of her education degree, and so has seen a decrease in her income over the past few months. She was reflected in her narrative about gift-giving – she claimed that she enjoys buying presents for others, but that this practice is now quite restricted for her. Sabine was one of the most reflective participants – this was particularly striking because she was also one of the youngest, and those born at the end of the 1970s tended to be less reflective. As may be expected, she has fewer memories of the GDR and of unification, but provided critical and detailed accounts about the division between the east and west in contemporary Germany.

### Lina

Lina was born in 1975, so she was fifteen years old when the Wall fell and thirty five years old when the interview took place. She grew up in Dresden and moved to Berlin in 1995, where she now lives with her husband, who is west German, and their ten year old son. She works as the Art Director for a prestigious interior design magazine, which means she has one of the highest incomes of all of the

participants. She is however quite uncomfortable about the amount that she earns and often mentioned that she sees herself as a modest consumer who is not sure what she should do with her money – in this sense she seemed to reject her relatively privileged lifestyle. Lina was very animated during the interview and repeatedly emphasised how she has benefited from experiencing the unification process – these experiences came through more strongly than her memories of the GDR. She was also one of the more critical and reflective participants, and hesitated when discussing mainstream perceptions of the east.

### Franziska

Franziska was born in 1972, and so was seventeen when the Wall fell and thirty seven when the interview took place. She grew up in a village close to Brandenburg and then moved to Berlin when she was eighteen years old, where she stayed for ten years. She then spent eight years living in Munich and America, and returned to Berlin in 2008. She is unmarried and does not have any children, and works as a personal assistant for a small company. Franziska appears to enjoy a relatively high income – she mentions this in relation to her desire to travel in her interview. Franziska was relatively reflective during her interview, and also the most defensive, particularly when it came to discussing the east-west distinction. These views stem primarily from her experiences in Munich, where she claims to have faced a lot of prejudice for being an easterner.

### Katja

Katja was born in 1979, so she was ten years old when the Wall fell and thirty one years old when the interview took place. She has lived in Berlin since she was born and lives with her partner, who is also east German. She does not have any children. She finished her degree in creative arts in 2009 and has been unemployed for ten months. She therefore has a very low income in comparison to the other participants. The economic problems she is facing were reflected in her narratives about unified Germany, where she claimed that she has very little faith in capitalism. She is also more wistful about her GDR upbringing, where she claims life was much simpler, but emphasises that she is glad that she no longer lives in an authoritarian state.



### Eva

Eva was born in 1977, so was twelve years old when the Wall fell and thirty two when the interview was carried out. She grew up in Schwerin, a town in northern Germany, and moved to Berlin in 2002. She is single, does not have any children, and works as a personal assistant for a member of the *Bundestag* (the German Parliament). She has a relatively high income, and claims that there is a significant gap between her own standard of living and that of her family, who still live in Schwerin and been unemployed for much of the time since unification. As may be expected, she has mixed views about unification, claiming that it was the best outcome for her, but not for her parents. She was less reflective than other participants in her interview – she intuitively used the labels ‘east’ and ‘west’ most often and struggled to explain what they meant when I prompted her.

### Elisabeth

Elisabeth was born in 1972, so she was seventeen years old when the Wall fell and thirty seven when the interviews took place. She has lived in Berlin since she was born and has a partner (who is west German) and a nine-year old daughter. She works as a freelance translator, which means her income is quite changeable – she talks a lot about the cost of living, particularly with reference to struggling to pay for childcare, which suggests that she has a more modest income than most of the other participants. Elisabeth was reasonably reflective in her interview. She often made quite sweeping comments, especially when comparing the east to the west, but tended to question her own views without my prompting and to add more depth and complexity to her opinions.

### Anna

Anna was born in 1971, so she was eighteen when the Wall fell and thirty eight when the interview took place. She grew up in a village in southern Saxony and moved to Berlin when she was eighteen, so during the *Wende*, to go to university. Anna is in a long-distance relationship, and her partner lives in Saxony, so she spends more time outside of Berlin than the other participants. She owns a small, moderately successful, advertising agency and has a relatively good income, but makes it clear that she sometimes struggles with the instability of being self-employed. Anna talked more about her memories of the GDR than the other participants, perhaps because she is one of the oldest, and was keen to point out

that the east was better than is commonly believed. She also explained, however, that as the child of a single-parent family, her educational opportunities were limited in the GDR – it is perhaps for this reason that she talks at length about the advantages that unification brought for her and her generation.

### Max

Max was born in 1975, so was fourteen years old when the Wall fell and thirty four at the time of the interview. He grew up in Cottbus and moved to Berlin in 1999, where he now lives with his wife (who is west German) and their two year old son. He works as a private banking advisor and has one of the highest incomes of all the participants. Max was very matter-of-fact in his interview – he spoke without hesitation about other easterners (whom he tended to be quite critical of) and had obviously thought about the issues raised in the interview before. He was less certain, however, about his own east Germanness – there was more hesitation and reflection when he talked about how his GDR experiences influenced his life in unified Germany.

### Julia

Julia was born in 1979, so was ten years old when the Wall fell and thirty years old when I interviewed her. She grew up in Berlin and continues to live there with her husband (who is west German) and their four year old son. She has recently returned to university to study psychology after working as a Kindergarten teacher. As a result of her husband's job, however, she claims that she has a very comfortable lifestyle – she stated that after years of struggling financially they now have more money than they need, and are planning to move to a more basic flat in Berlin where they will be able to appreciate the simpler aspects of life. Of all of the participants, Julia has experienced the most east-west tension – she spoke in detail about the prejudices that her west German husband faced when he first met her family, and is extremely critical of such viewpoints. Perhaps as a result of these experiences, Anna was one of the most reflective participants, as well as the most critical of the east-west distinction.

### Sonja

Sonja was born in 1971, so was eighteen years old when the Wall fell and thirty eight when I interviewed her. She was born in Berlin and continues to live there

with her partner (who is west German) and their twenty month old son. She works part-time as a teacher and spends the rest of her time looking after her child. She has a relatively high standard of living, but also mentions that her financial situation has been more difficult since she stopped working full time – this experience influences her perceptions of consumption, in that she claims material items have become less important to her. Compared to the other participants born in the early 1970s, Sonja talked less about her memories of the GDR, and more about her eastern identity in unified Germany. She was more reflective when talking about herself than when talking about others – she intuitively used the labels of ‘east’ and ‘west’ to discuss others but presented herself as a combination of the two.

### Alexander

Alexander was born in 1976, so he was thirteen years old when the Wall fell and thirty three when the interview was carried out. He lived in Mecklenburg until 2007 when he moved to Berlin. He is married (to Maike) and has a nine year old daughter and four year old son. Alexander works as an engineer in Rolls Royce, and perceives himself to have a relative modest income – this comes through when he discusses his desire to move to a more central area of Berlin, but claims that his salary will not stretch to pay higher rent. Alexander was relatively matter-of-fact in his accounts about his east Germanness – he does not mention issues such as east-west tensions or problematic stereotypes about the east as much as the other participants. His east Germanness is important to him, but he simply sees this to sit as part of his German identity.

### Maike

Maike was born in 1979, so was ten years old when the Wall fell and thirty years old when I interviewed her. She grew up in Mecklenburg and moved to Berlin with her husband (Alexander) and two children (a nine year old daughter and four year old son) in 2007. Maike works as an accountant and, like her husband, perceives herself to have a relatively modest income. However, she sees this as less of a problem than her husband – she continuously claims that material items are not important to her – a value which she links directly to her east Germanness. Of all the participants, Maike had the most intuitive understanding of what it is to be an easterner. She was relatively unreflective in her narrative

and demonstrated a straightforward understanding of the east and west categories.

### Marie

Marie was born in 1976, so was thirteen years old when the Wall fell and thirty three when I interviewed her. She grew up in Brandenburg and moved to Berlin to study when she was eighteen. She recently moved to Potsdam with her partner – they do not have any children. She works as the lead administrator for a member of the *Bundestag* (the German Parliament), and has a relatively high income. Marie evidently takes an interest in east German issues and talked at length about the economic instability and psychological problems that she claims they have faced since unification. This does not mean she problematises unification, but the way that it was carried out. Marie's narrative was particularly striking, as her views about the east and west were the most clear-cut of all of the participants.

### Jens

Jens was born in 1974, so he was fifteen years old when the Wall fell and thirty five when I interviewed him. He has lived in Berlin all his life and works as a business banking advisor. He is single and does not have children. Jens was the only participant who did not want his interview to be recorded – this means that, although his perceptions were included in the coding phase of data analysis, I was not able to carry out in-depth discourse analysis on his narrative.

#### Appendix 4: Interview questions (German version)

1. Was ist dein Geburtsdatum?
2. Wo wohnst du? Kannst du mir erzählen, wo du als Kind gewohnt hast, und wann und wo du umgezogen bist?
3. Was arbeitest du?
4. Und was ist dein Familienstand? Hast du Kinder?
5. Erinnerst du dich an Kindertag in der DDR? Wie hast du gefeiert? Was hast du für Geschenke gekriegt?
6. Feierst du Kindertag heutzutage? Kennst du jemanden, der Kindertag heutzutage feiert? Wie wird er typisch gefeiert?
7. Wie würdest du die Einstellungen der heutigen Kinder zu Geschenken mit deinen kindlichen Einstellungen vergleichen?
8. Würdest du sagen, dass Geschenkerwartungen sich seit der Wende verändert haben? **[Jetzt/Vergangenheit, in den neuen und alten Ländern.]**
9. Kaufst du je ein Geschenk für dich selbst? Wann? Warum?  
**[Jetzt/Vergangenheit, in den neuen und alten Ländern.]**

#### **[ZETTEL 1]**

10. Wenn du ein Geschenk kriegst, was ist am wichtigsten für dich? **[In den neuen und alten Ländern.]**
11. Du bist zu Besuch in Großbritannien und willst etwas mitnehmen, um ihnen zu danken. Was nimmst du mit?
12. Und in Hamburg zum Beispiel?
13. Und wie wäre es in Leipzig?

#### **[WERBUNGEN]**

14. Welche Werbung ist dir lieber? Warum?
15. Manche dieser Werbungen werden auf die neuen Länder gezielt, und manche auf die alten. Deine Meinung nach, welche werden für die neuen Länder produziert? Warum?

16. Glaubst du, dass Leute in den neuen Ländern bestimmte Einstellungen zu Konsum haben?

**[ZETTEL 2]**

17. Inwieweit passen die folgenden Phrasen zu dir als Konsument?

**[ZETTEL 3]**

18. Deiner Meinung nach, wie häufig oder selten sind diese Konsumententypen in den neuen und alten Ländern?

19. Was bedeutet dir die Begriffe Ossi und Wessi?

**[AMPELMANN UND KNUSPERFLOCKEN]**

20. Kannst du mir ein bisschen über den *Ampelmann* erzählen?

21. Und *Knusperflocken*? Hast du die in der DDR gegessen?

22. Wie würdest du diese Produkte beschreiben? Ich meine, sind die einfach Süßigkeiten, oder haben die eine tiefere Bedeutung?

23. Könntest du mir Ostalgie erklären? **[Verschiedene Bedeutungen...Ablehnung von..., DDR zurückzuwollen, Verständnis für eigene Vergangenheit.]**

24. Deiner Meinung nach, ist Ostalgie eine gute Beschreibung der Gefühle der Leute in den neuen Ländern?

25. Würdest du sagen, dass du dich irgendwie ostdeutsch fühlst? Wie würdest du diese Gefühle beschreiben?

**Andere Teilnehmer**

## Appendix 5: Interview questions (English version)

1. What is your date of birth?
2. Where do you live? Could you tell me where you lived as a child, and when and where you moved?
3. What is your job?
4. What is your marital status? Do you have children?
5. Do you remember *Kindertag* (Children's Day) in the GDR? How did you celebrate? What sort of presents did you get?
6. Do you celebrate *Kindertag* now? Do you know anyone who celebrates *Kindertag* now? How is it usually celebrated?
7. How would you compare the attitudes of today's children to presents with your own childhood attitudes?
8. Would you say that, when it comes to gifts, expectations have changed since unification? **[Now/past, in the old and new states.]**
9. Do you ever buy a gift for yourself? When? Why? **[Now/past, in the old and new states.]**

### **[SHEET 1]**

10. What is most important for you when you receive a gift? **[In old and new states.]**
11. You are in Great Britain and would like to take something with you to thank your host. What do you take?
12. And in Hamburg for example?
13. And how about in Leipzig?

### **[ADVERTS]**

14. Which advert do you prefer? Why?
15. Some of these adverts are targetted at the new states, and some at the old ones. In your opinion, which ones are targetted at the new states? Why?
16. Do you think that people in the new states have distinctive attitudes towards consumption?

### **[SHEET 2]**

17. To what extent do the following phrases match you as a consumer?

**[SHEET 3]**

18. In your opinion, how common or rare are these types of consumers in the old and new states?

19. What do the terms *Ossi* and *Wessi* mean to you?

**[AMPELMANN AND KNUSPERFLOCKEN]**

20. Could you tell me a little bit about the *Ampelmann*?

21. And *Knusperflocken*? Did you eat them in the GDR?

22. How would you describe these products? I mean, are they simply sweets, or do they have a deeper meaning?

23. Could you explain *Ostalgie* to me? **[Different meanings...rejection..., desire to have the GDR back, appreciation of own past.]**

24. In your opinion, is *Ostalgie* a good description for the way that people in the new states feel?

25. Would you say that you feel east German in any way? How would you describe these sentiments?

**Other participants**



**Appendix 6: Interview activity sheet one (German version)**

	Sehr wichtig _____ Unwichtig
Dass es teuer ist.	
Dass es nicht zu viel kostet.	
Dass es nützlich ist.	
Dass es ein Luxus ist.	
Dass der Geschenkgeber großzügig ist.	
Dass der Schenkende viel Zeit im Geschenk investiert hat.	
Dass der Schenkende sich Gedanken draüber gemacht hat.	
Dass du ein Geschenk von ähnlichem Wert zurückschenken kannst.	

**Appendix 7: Interview activity sheet one (English version)**

	Very important      _____      Unimportant
That it's expensive.	
That it doesn't cost too much.	
That it's useful.	
That's it's a luxury.	
That the person giving the gift is generous.	
That the person giving the gift has put a lot of time into it.	
That the person giving the gift has put thought into it.	
That you are able to give back a present of a similar value.	

# Appendix 10: Interview activity sheet two (German version)

	Häufig _____ Selten
Ich achte auf den Preis.	
Ich bin sparsam.	
Ich achte auf Qualität.	
Ich suche gezielt nach Sonderangeboten.	
Ich achte mehr auf Preis als auf Marke.	
Ich kaufe meist geplant.	
Ich probiere gern Neues aus.	
Ich bin modebewußt.	
Ich kaufe oft spontan.	
Ich nehme häufig Kredite in Anspruch.	
Ich möchte so sein wie Leute in Werbung.	
Ich leiste mir gern teure Sachen.	

**Appendix 11: Interview activity sheet two (English version)**

	Often _____ Rarely
I am mindful of the price.	
I am careful with money.	
I am mindful of quality.	
I deliberately look for special offers.	
I am more mindful of the price than the brand.	
I mostly plan what to buy.	
I like to try new things out.	
I am fashion conscious.	
I often shop spontaneously.	
I often buy things on credit.	
I want to be like people in adverts.	
I like to buy myself expensive things.	

## Appendix 12: Interview activity sheet three

**In den neuen Ländern**  
(In the new states)

**In den alten Ländern**  
(In the old states)

Häufig  
(Oft)

**Selten**  
(Rarely)